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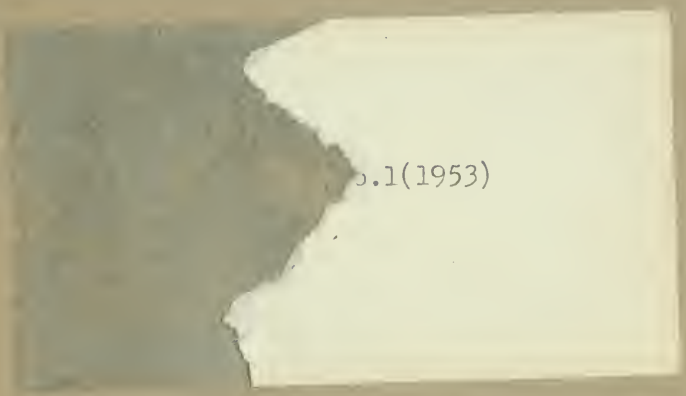

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ESTABLISHED 1889

POET LORE

WORLD LITERATURE

AND THE

DRAMA

ALEXANDER BLOK

CLIFFORD MONTAGUE

CARL TONSBERG

— and others —

SPRING 1953

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A QUARTERLY OF WORLD LITERATURE

Founded in 1889 by

CHARLOTTE PORTER and HELEN A. CLARKE

EDMUND R. BROWN, *Editor*

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YOU WERE MINE

Go to sleep, my child,
go to sleep, smiling,
for a choir of stars
is rocking you now.

You enjoyed the day
and happy you were.
Very well you fared
for you have had me.

Go to sleep, my child,
go to sleep, smiling,
for the loving Earth
is rocking you now.

You beheld the rose
glowing and bright red.
You embraced the world,
and you embraced me.

Go to sleep, my child,
go to sleep, smiling,
for God in darkness
is rocking you now.

— *Gabriela Mistral*

(Translated from the Spanish by Edna Lue Furness by special permission of Gabriela Mistral. Copyright, Gabriela Mistral.)

THREE POEMS

By RYAH TUMARKIN GOODMAN

DRINK THE NOONDAY WINE

Drink the noonday wine
From gourds of columbine
Nodding in the wind,
Curving scimitars of sun
Into hollow spur of larkspur,
Streaking dusky heart of sunflower
With saffron shaded radiance.

Everywhere the cider sun is seeping:
Steeping lobes of clefted leaves with polyphonic light.
Soon blazoned day the tender shoots will kindle,
Soon scintillantly sprayed will be the yellow pollen dust,
And jugs of air will fluctuate and teeter
On burning brink of lucent noons
Inebriated with the lambent luster of the sun.

When will this amber tippling slant
The dancing shadow of a star,
Circle with shining the coiling tendril
Spiraling the passion-flower vine?

Could I within my orbit
Bare the blazing halo of the sun,
I would burnish bud and blossom,
Brand the yellow primrose with the flush of fire.
Nothing would escape my splendor:
Clumps of marigold
Or the seed leaf of a seed.
All would bear my ardent scar,
Flare like coral fagots,
Flame on flame.

THIS SEPULCHRE KNOWS NO MOURNERS

This sepulchre knows no mourners.
This is a tomb unmourned by man.
In this internment, bones and leaves and tree trunks
Are minerals, metals, rarest gems.
In black shining walls lie hidden fires
Awaiting toilers of the deepest deep
To lance the working face of earth
With picks and shovels, steel rock drills.
A muffled roar: the crumbling pillars
Are mounds of fallen coal.
The veins of earth are bursting with iron, salt, and ore.

Bore holes into the core of rock.
Split mineral seams with sharpest shafts.
Build on decay your sunken cities of platinum and gold.
O earth, lavishly you've yielded the herded bounty
Of your dust to man.
And still man probes, man plucks
More opulence, more splendors
From earth's resplendent catacombs,
Forgetting in himself is richest compost
Of the flowering soil.

DIVINITY OF DUST

Why shrink from banners broken in the weeds,
Or stare with horror at a blackened root?
Hills, mountains of ancient dust,
Cannot mar the classic form of beauty,
For crumbling beauty still attains perfection,
Disdaining dust's decree.

Rejoice in dust's undying dignity,
Look valiantly into a face of dying days.
Upon a ravaged face a noble grace reposes,
Relinquished to decay are passion's sharpest hungers,
Diminished to a naked seed the deepest love and hate,
And one beneficence is left, one only:
The once extolled array of loveliness
Exalted to the sovereign divinity of dust.

JUNE LANDSCAPE

With dazzling splendor
The summer sun
Warms the world
As a beautiful thought
Warms the heart.

Behold the myriad shades of green
From the darkened cool of the glen
To the burnished gold of the meadow.

Close the ledger, fool,
Throttle the engine,
Silence the dollars;
Please —

Gaze on the sunlit landscape
In rapture hushed and humble
And pray with fervor profound
That you may be worthy
To behold
Such beauty.

— *Elihu T. Feinberg*

THE COMIC SHILLELAGH

(Only the Irish Can Write Comedy!)

By CLIFFORD MONTAGUE

Practically every nation in the world is familiar with the comic picture of a belligerent Irishman swinging a shillelagh at the heads of his antagonists.

This old-time picture of the Irishman is one that the world has accepted as depicting a national character, but that it is a one-sided view of the national Irish spirit there can be no doubt any more than there can be doubt that there are definitely different counties in old Erin.

A more positive view or measure — one more in "character" and more true than that of the stick-swinging "mick" — is the comic spirit of the Irish. For undoubtedly all the world will acknowledge that, as a nation, the Irish have a comic spirit unrivalled, even undeveloped, by other nations. It is in acceptance and recognition of this spirit that the Irish have so often been lampooned as comic — though bellicose — characters.

What the world does not generally know, however, is that this spirit can be noted especially in the field of dramatic art or, more concisely, in the Irish playwrights.

In all art there are simplicities more difficult and complex than the most serried complications. This is especially true of the art of playwriting and of that art most particularly true of comedy writing.

It may soon be a truism in the theatre that only the Irish dramatists have written the kind of comedy which has been — if not an instantaneous hit — at least retained in the public mind sufficiently long enough to be classed as literature. This truism has been a long time in the building, but it is becoming more and more noticeable. That it holds more than just an element of truth can be seen in the immediate past and comparative recent history of the comic stage. A perusal of the history of drama will uphold the thesis that

it is to the Irish writers we must turn when a good comedy is wanted, begorrah.

Perhaps one of the reasons why drama today may be in the plight it is is because not enough people have realized just how much beholden the world is to the Irish dramatists. The modern drawing-room comedy, while perhaps dealing with English, Continental, or even American exteriors and characters, is not so much basically English comedy at all but Irish — or comedy with roots so firmly planted in the spirit of the Irish nationality that it may be said to be Irish. This spirit is more, it may be surmised, than just a sense of the comical, the ludicrous, the fantastic, the ridiculous, or even the accurate depiction of "character." The prime quality of Irish comic plays — although dealing with satire of habits or modes of thought, or the ludicrous exposition of foolish idiosyncrasies — is their universality to all mankind, regardless of nationality. That is why, in plays of character, no writers have bettered the Irish in drawing such widely known or recognized groups of characters who evoke a sympathy with whatever audience they are shown to. In writing the comedy of manners, of satire or sophistication, who better than the Irish have produced work to compare with those arch-types of comic writers — Richard Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, or William Somerset Maugham?

It can be said that not only have the Irish writers become the masters of comic writing, but they have been the leaders in the field since the beginning of its history. As shown by their work they are not only its masters but its peers. In short, it may be said that only the Irish have written real comic drama.

The theatre world, of course, is replete with dramatists, who were good writers, being awarded the palm or laurel — but not for their work in the field of comedy. While it is true that the history of comedy writing is shorter than any other branch in the art of writing, not appearing until the Elizabethan age when comedy was written primarily for satirizing or attempting a literary coup d'etat against a literary, personal, or political enemy, it will be found that it

was the Irish who discovered the mine that proved such a lode in literature, and developed the vein that has immeasurably enriched world drama. And coming down the centuries it can be seen that it has been the Irish, more than any other group or nationality, who have carried on the traditions of real comic drama. It may surprise everyone but the Irish to know that the outstanding writers of English comedy were not the English but the Irish, as any roster of comic drama writers will attest.

That the history of comic drama began with an Irishman can be noted quickly by any student of the art. This progenitor was George Farquhar, who was born in Londonderry in 1678 and died in 1708. In the space of his thirty years, however, Farquhar wrote seven outstanding plays in the comic genre. They were so good, in fact, that they helped establish the mode so that when the genius William Congreve appeared he merely had to develop the vein further rather than to originate the type.

A quibbling researcher may claim that Congreve, being a Yorkshireman, was therefore English, and since he lived from 1670 to 1729, he therefore was the father of modern comedy writing. But an essential point in Congreve's life, and one that had a particular bearing on his literary work, was the fact that Congreve was educated in the schools of Kilkenny and the University of Dublin. To a student of dramatic composition there can be no doubt that, with his formal education, the embryonic dramatist imbibed and partook, through first-hand contact, enough natural Irish wit and comic spirit to influence his thought and work. Only thus can we account for this dramatist's love of exaggeration and the ridiculous, and his penchant for brilliant pyrotechnics in the verbal line, that abound in his works. While these may be very natural attributes for a writer later acclaimed the head and master of comic dramaturgy, it is doubtful if Congreve could have reached his zenith in this line had he not absorbed that comic quality for which he is noted while he was exposed to the classic comedy inherent in and so very strongly a part of the very genius of the Irish nation.

Regardless of the beginning, however, the Irish dramatists can never be accorded a backseat in the modern art known as "comedy of manners" or "English drawing-room comedy." One of the foremost innovators of this type of drama was Oliver Goldsmith. This author, born in the village of Pallas, County Longford, now ranks with the greatest writers of the eighteenth century. Charming and versatile as all his work is, however, he is mostly remembered today because of his supreme work in his play, "She Stoops To Conquer," still considered one of the great comedies of the world.

Another leader was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, a native Dubliner, who with Congreve was responsible for establishing comic drama to its high degree during the Restoration period. It was Congreve, Goldsmith, and Sheridan who raised, by the sheer quality of their work, comic drama to the status of "literature," and more than that, gave it the dignity of being an art in itself.

At the end of the 19th century it was Oscar Wilde — and later George Bernard Shaw — both Irishmen, who carried on the traditions of comic writing. Wilde imbued the craft with his own sparkling paradoxes that made it palatable for the English, while Shaw, little appreciated in England and Ireland, nevertheless carried the tradition to Europe. Shaw's work, in fact, has so captivated the audiences in other countries that, in those examples where the writers of different nationalities have attempted the genre, the result has been one of emulation and imitation rather than original creation.

Among the moderns it has been William Somerset Maugham who developed the tradition of Gaelic wit to the fine point of finish that we know today. This writer's comedies — among the best that have ever been written, and in the same vein and temper as Congreve's and Sheridan's work — not only approximate but excel "The Way of the World," and "The Double Dealer," "The Rivals," and "The School For Scandal." Indisputably English in everything but his comedies, it is possible to discover that Maugham, as the name indicates, is of Celtic extraction and the family of Irish

origin that later emigrated to Westmoreland. If the ancestral background is not sufficient, it is only necessary by a quick survey of such of his comedies as "Our Betters," "The Circle," and "Lady Frederick," to note how deep his roots are in the very heart of Ireland. Such a survey will substantiate by wit, spritely dialogue, spontaneous gaiety, and use of pure comic situation, that this writer's work could derive from nothing but a truly Gaelic temperament.

It has been said that nothing can be proved so well as by exceptions, and the contention that only the Irish can write comedy is proved by only a few notable exceptions. These are the English writers Frederick Lonsdale and Noel Coward, and the Austrian playwright Arthur Schnitzler. These dramatists are non-conformists in nationality only — for their respective work shows them to have an innate co-spirituality with their Gaelic confreres — and with the possible inclusion of François Moliere and the American George S. Kaufman, these writers are the only happy exceptions to prove the rule.

In fact, it is so apparent only the Irish can write comedy it might be said that, if a writer wanted to make comedy his forte, he should first make sure his roots are well established in the Irish soil or soul. If they are not, he will be merely another writer of tragedy — or a playwright who writes tragically.

And a dramatist who does not have the basic spirit of Irish comedy in his blood to guide him can never hope to wield his pen-shillelagh to properly clout the world into attention — as so many of our comic dramatists have had to do. And if a playwright cannot do this it is certain he will never draw a true comic picture in the accepted Irish manner . . .

A CELESTIAL SYMPHONY

SOME CHINESE POEMS ON MUSIC

(*Translated from the originals by* Robert Wood Clack)

TO T'ANG THE SUCCESSFUL*

From the Sacrificial Odes of the Book of Poetry
(traditional date, 17th Century B.C.)

When all is in order, so perfect, complete,
  What harmony beats on the ear!
Our cymbals and drums in paeans unite
  To the fame of our glorious sire!

Descendants of T'ang, we invoke here his aid:
  "Give joy and repose to our souls!"
The echoing drumbeats, deep, rhythmic, and loud,
  Resound while the flageolet wails.

Each chord of our anthem is lyric and sweet,
  Attuned to sonorous stone chimes.
The fame of Great T'ang is harmonious and bright—
  His offspring now bask in its beams!

To the clang of the bells and the crash of the drum
  The dancers exhibit their grace.
The scions of kings here honor his name;
  And rejoice to do reverence with us.

*T'ang the Successful was the reputed founder of the Shang Dynasty, which traditionally replaced the Hsia Dynasty in 1766 B.C.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

From the Wisdom of Yao (Third Century B.C.)

When I sound these chimes of stone,
  Whether soft or loud,
The fiercest beasts are overthrown;
  Humbled are the proud!

Feudal chieftains cease their strife
  At my symphony;
Through the Empire peace is rife,
  Joy and harmony!

When I pluck my sweet-stringed lute,
  Ancestors draw near,
Spirits gratified, though mute —
  Just content to hear!

THE SONG OF CH'I LIANG

By Mei Sheng (died about 140 B.C.)

Off northeast lofty castle turrets rise,
Embattlements like clouds in summer skies,
Each casement draped with satin tapestries,
While triple stairs link up its galleries.

Down from its towers the autumn breeze now brings
Faint tones from one who plays her lute and sings.
I think I never heard so sad a song —
They say it is the plaint of Ch'i Liang!

The melody moans like an autumn chant;
Then half way through it pauses, hesitant,
To interweave three sobbing sighs of grief —
As if her music failed to give relief!

With boundless sympathy my soul is stirred —
What pity should her song remain unheard!
My voice joins hers to soar like two wild geese —
Perhaps our throbbing wings will bring her peace!

Ch'i Liang lost her father, husband, and son all at once, and so drowned herself in the Ch'u River. Her grief was so great that the walls of the city or the river bank collapsed in sympathy several days later!

THE BREEZE OF SPRING
By Ho Hung (Early Sixth Century)

I've never seen the tuneful breeze of spring,
  And yet I hear it singing all around:
Now rough and loud, now gently whispering —
  Sometimes it holds its breath, without a sound!

Around my mirror, full of impish play,
  It dusts my rouge and powder all about —
Then chuckles and runs merrily away,
  Exchanging low-voiced gossip with my lute!

MELANCHOLIA
By Liu Hsiao-hsien (early Sixth Century)

The night is sad — so sad I cannot rest;
  Sleep will not come, nor is there any peace.
I gaze across the terrace toward the west,
  Where moonbeams cast weird shapes beneath the eaves.
  The wind stirs, whispering through the fallen leaves,
And melancholy yearnings fill my breast!

I draw upon my *sheng:* an eerie note
  Thrills from its ring of reeds; I pluck my lute —
A wailing comes from strings too dry and taut,
  That snap in protest — but my throat is mute!

In one short life man has too much to bear;
My soul is weighted down with unmixed woe.
Filled with regrets that never will depart,
I sit and dream in unalloyed despair.
Where is a mirror clear enough to show
The true reflection of a broken heart!

SPRING RETURNS
By Sui Fu-jen (late Sixth Century)

I thought my heart was sunk in grief; yet tears refuse to flow!
And when I try to voice a sigh I breathe a happy song!
Out in the court on bud and leaf the sun's bright colors glow —
So how can I lament and cry, when Spring's tunes come along!

Sui Fu-jen is only "A Woman of Sui" — probably a palace lady.

LISTENING TO A FRIEND PLAY THE LUTE
By Meng Hao-jan (689-740)

Though wine has lost him friends he does not grieve,
But lies where breezes cool the bamboo glade.
Half-tipsy, he rips off his silken sleeve
To dust his dragon-handled lute of jade.

Each cup he drinks his lyrics grow more sweet;
I do not even sense the sun has set —
But lingering here in this hillside retreat,
I hear his songs — and all else I forget!

UNDER THE BAMBOOS
By Wang Wei (699-759)

I lie here in a shady bamboo glade,
To strum my lute and sing a merry tune.
Alas, who hears the melody I've made?
Or even looks at me — except the moon!

THE OLD HARP
By Liu Chang-ch'ing (Eighth Century)

The nights grow long and cold, old harp of seven strings!
And eerie is the tune the wind-swept pine-top sings.
Your favorite songs are those you played in bygone days —
You'd never be content to echo modern lays!

THE HIDDEN FLUTE
By Li Po (705-762)

From someone's hidden flute shrill tones are echoing;
Like Spring's fresh fragrant sigh the music floats on by!
What haunting melody! the Willow Song of Spring!
Who hears it and forgets? One's youth can never die!

EVENING BY THE SPRING
By Li Po

The sun retires behind the hills, lets twilight have its fling.
With soul at peace I linger here beside this flowing spring.
From other streams it keeps itself chaste, pure, and undefiled —
Unlike us men who mingle saint with sinner, tame with wild!
I raise my voice in song to crimson clouds and crescent moon —
And when I cease the green pine boughs continue with my tune!

TWO FLUTES
By Li Po

One evening as I lingered by the stream
To breathe the twilight's delicate perfume,
There faintly came an essence still more sweet:
Wind-wafted echoes from a far-off flute!

To answer it I cut a willow plume —
A poor response to music so sublime —
And when at last all other sounds grew mute,
Trilled back a tune upon the enchanted night!

Since then at dusk when day's harsh din grows still,
The birds hear two mysterious songsters call.
They do not recognize what creatures sing —
But nonetheless they understand the song!

ETERNAL LONGINGS
By Li Po

Sunset's colors all have faded; mists of twilight hide the flowers;
Lighted by chill silver moonbeams, sad and sleepless drag the hours.
Thrown aside my Shansi zither, mute the single note it sings;
Now I pluck my lute from Szechuan, with its double love-bird strings.
Music filled with love and longing cannot penetrate to you —
Would the winds of spring could waft it, even faintly, to your ears!
But you seem forever distant, far beyond the heaven's blue!
So my eyes that once were sparkling with those happy years,
Now have turned to bitter fountains, flowing wells of tears!
Can you ever doubt the anguish of my broken heart?
Come and gaze upon my mirror — marring grief will not depart!

ON HEARING A SHU PRIEST PLAY THE LUTE
By Li Po

A monk, his lute unwrapped from satin case,
  Comes strolling down the mount whereon he dwells.
He plays one chord upon its strings — I trace
  The breeze from spicy pines in countless dells;
I feel the cleansing freshness of cool rills;
  I hear the joyous chime of frosty bells —
And hardly sense dusk creeping up the hills,
  Where autumn posts her misty sentinels!

THE MUSIC OF THE GODS
By Tu Fu (712-770)

The flutes one hears at Chin Ch'eng intoxicate like wine:
They waft the soul to dreamland on the perfumed twilight breeze!
  Such melodies from heaven belong to the divine —
  Should mortals ever listen except on bended knees?

SONGS OF A NIGHT
By Tu Fu

The night wind whispers shyly through the leaves;
  Behind the hills the crescent moon has passed;
With cool, kind dews the weeping midnight grieves;
  So now my lute-strings wake to sing at last.

Through fragrant shadows starlit brooklets glide,
  Caressing lotus buds along the banks;
While high aloft bright constellations ride
  Across the dark abyss in silent ranks.

What harmonies bewitch the poet's ear!
  What fantasies allure as fireflies throng!
One fears their tiny lamps may disappear
  Before the thoughts they bring burst into song!

Now ancient heroes flash their two-edged blades,
As pride and passion surge to show their might.
The wine-cup's inspiration warms and fades,
Like red stars flashing through the mists of night.

Now faintly echo sad old airs of Wu,
Which call for each his latest song to mind.
As white sails down the stream fade out of view,
Just so the thoughts that linger on behind!

AUTUMN DUSK

By Ts'en Ts'an (Eighth Century)

The dusk drifts down; afar the night winds moan;
As twilight chills, the snowy heron speeds
Across the bleak sand dunes, and only dawn
Can call him from his shelter in the reeds.

One star is mirrored in the dark lagoon.
My sympathetic lute, my one true friend,
Beneath my fingers sings a haunting tune —
Then sobs, as into one our spirits blend!

Now deathless voices answer to the strings,
And memories forgotten through long years
Awake, to stir remorse that cuts and stings —
Till dewy midnight joins me with her tears!

PLAYING THE HARPSICHORD

By Li Tuan (732-792)

Sweet music from gold-fretted harpsichord
Flows off her fingers in the Hall of Jade.
But now and then there comes a mild discord —
To draw Chou Yü's attention, I'm afraid!

Chou Yu was a famous soldier, but his musical ear was so keen that a single off-note was sure to draw his attention to the musician.

THE OLD CHAO HARPER
By Po Chu-yi (772-846)

The singers' voices hush their sweet, clear tones,
The row of red-sleeved dancers no more swings;
An ancient harper stands to pluck his lute,
Swaying to vibrant chords from five silk strings.

The loud notes swell to fill the festive hall
With salvos like the dash of wind-blown drops;
And then, like eerie, ghostly whisperings,
Each soft note dies away until it stops!

Now jovial as the jay's gay song of luck;
Now melancholy as the monkey's wail —
His fingers do not stop on one fixed key,
But wander up and down the five-toned scale.

And those who sit to listen to his lute
Seem stirred to upmost depths of heart and soul;
While those who, passing, hear his tones, stop short,
Charmed by unearthly powers beyond control!

Alas, what pity that the common ear
Should crave these modern airs, neglect the old!
And so the lute is laid aside, unused,
Where each day thicker grows the dust and mold!

THE OLD HARP
By Po Chu-yi

Old harp of silken cords and sandalwood,
Its soul still full of ancient rhapsodies:
Sweet airs, unsuited to the modern mood
Of harsher, more exotic melodies.

Though chipped and faded are its frets of jade,
And mold has dimmed the scarlet of its strings;
In quality its tone has not decayed,
And clear and sweet resound the chords it sings.

I'd play it — but no one desires to hear —
Alas, that it should be neglected so!
Youth's taste in music is depraved, I fear —
They want the flute of Ch'iang, the Ch'in oboe!

Ch'iang was a barbarian Tartar state outside the Great Wall; Ch'in the ancient state which first united all China, but always regarded as crude and unorthodox by cultured Chinese.

SWEET WAVES OF JADE
By Po Chu-yi

I love to hear you sing that sweet old song
Of "Jade Green Waters" — for its rhythmic waves
Cleanse from my soul all sense of grief and wrong,
Leaving that calm, sad comfort one so craves.

The melody floats through my western windows,
Where all day long I sit in peace to muse,
And watch the slender, graceful dancing shadows,
As scented breezes sway the slim bamboos!

THE LUTE PLAYER
By Po Chu-yi

In the tenth year of Yüan Ho (815) I was degraded and banished to Kiukiang as Subprefect. In the fall of the year I was bidding farewell to a friend at the port of the city; and at midnight we heard from a nearby boat a lute player; and her chords sounded as if they were played in the metropolitan manner. Upon inquiry the player said she had been a singing girl at Ch'ang An (the T'ang Dynasty capital), and had studied the art of the lute under that famous mae-

stro, Mu Ts'ao-er. But as she matured she lost her good looks and her grace, so she retired to marry a trader. I offered her wine and invited her to play and sing for us. Sadly she told in detail the story of her early successes — but now she had drifted to the Yangtze Valley, worn out and needy, and with nothing to do. I had been gone from my post at the capital for almost two years, and so far had been fairly contented and peaceful; but touched by her story that night, I really felt myself to be an exile. So I wrote this long "Ballad of the Lute Player" in her honor:

One evening at the riverside I bade a guest farewell,
Where maple leaves and rushes murmured under autumn's spell.
As host I had dismounted, while my guest stood in his boat:
We raised our cups — but missed a flute's or zither's cheering note!

But even wine could not dispel our grief at parting soon.
We said farewell; the river mirrored back the shimmering moon.
When suddenly across the stream a lute began to play —
And host forgot to turn back home, and guest to go his way!

We traced the music to its source, to ask the player's name;
The tones broke off; we asked again — but still no answer came!
We moved our boat up nearer to invite her as our guest;
We called for wine, and trimmed our lamps to recommence our feast.

We called a thousand times and urged — it seemed of no avail;
But, face half-hidden by her lute, at last she reached our rail.
She turned her tuning pegs and struck at random several notes —
And even though she played no tune, emotion choked our throats!

Each string she struck brought memories; with grief each
tone was rife;
As if it told of deep frustrations! agonies! of life!
And then with bowed-down head her nimble fingers voiced
her plaint —
Exquisite music laying bare her soul without restraint!

She stroked the strings and fondled them with cadences and
runs:
First came the tune of "Rainbow Skirt," and then "The
Six Wee Ones."
First loudly like the splattering when pelting raindrops fall;
Then softly like the murmurings when twilight's nestlings
call!

Now mingled tinkling music in the motif we create
When a string of pearls is dropped apart upon a crystal
plate;
Now liquid like the orioles beneath the buds of May,
Or trickling like the mountain rill that dances on its way!

Then, as the rushing torrent's voice is stilled by winter's
frost,
The music slowly died away, with all its passion lost,
Concealing depths of poignant woe, prophetic and profound,
In silence — which expressed far more than ever came from
sound!

And then, as water gushes from a shattered porcelain vase,
Or on a horseman's coat of mail is crashed a sword or mace,
Once more she plucked the vibrant strings; released her
soul's ferment —
And the cords cut through the silence like the slash when
silk is rent!

No sound from boats to east of us; all quiet on the west!
We watched the mirrored autumn moon glance off the river's
breast.
The echoes ceased; between the strings she thrust the pick in
place;

Then rose and smoothed her clothing; and with formal down-
cast face

She told us that from tender years Ch'ang An was her
abode;
Her parents' home was just beneath the Hillock of the Toad.
At thirteen she had mastered all the technique of the lute —
Of all who studied with her she was first, beyond dispute!

Her playing even won the greatest experts' grudging
praise;
Her beauty was the envy of all dancers in those days.
All Wuling's youths came suing for her favors, one great
throng;
And countless rolls of silk brocade were payment for one
song!

No tears for broken silver combs of inlaid pearl design;
Nor when red satin skirts were stained by upset bowls of
wine;
For next year always brought new joys ere this year's pleas-
ures fled —
The autumn moon, like winds of spring, passed heedless
overhead!

Till first her brother went to war; her mother passed away.
Dawns came and twilights went — alas! her beauty would
not stay!
With ever fewer chariots and horses at her gate,
She finally consented to become a merchant's mate.

But he put profit first of all, and left her heartlessly;
Two months ago he went to Fou Liang to purchase tea.
And so she brought her lonely boat to ply here to and fro —
Her only friends the moon above, cold river waves below!
How often in the midnight hours she dreamed of bygone
years,
And sobbed herself awake to find her eyelids red with
tears! . . .

. . . When first she played her lute I sighed to feel its poignant thrill;
But now that I had heard her tale my sighs were sadder still!
"Companions in misfortune here," I cried, "where Heaven ends,
Why stand on ceremony? We are understanding friends!
Last year I left the capital to travel many a mile;
And here at Hsün Yang pass my days, a weary, sick exile!

"And in such wilds as this Hsün Yang, what music can one hear?
No lute, nor even bamboo flute, throughout the livelong year!
The land around the river port is marshy, low and damp,
With yellow leaves and bitter bamboos all around the camp.

"When morning comes or twilight falls, what sounds are to be heard?
The monkey's mournful wailing, or harsh croaks from some night-bird!
And so, at flowering dawn in spring, or autumn's moonlit night,
I take to wine and drink alone: one solace for my plight!

"As for the village folksongs or the pipes of mountaineers:
They are so crude, discordant, harsh — they grate upon my ears!
And so tonight when listening to your lute's soul-stirring notes,
I seemed to hear immortal music tuned for fairy throats!

"I pray you do not leave us! Play airs for us again!
And I will write your lute a song — the best that I can pen!"
In gratitude for friendly words one moment she stood still;
Then sat and plucked her strings again — with even greater thrill!

The tunes were not the same, yet stirred one's soul to greater woe;
All listeners covered up their faces; tears began to flow —
And who was touched to heart the most of all her retinue?
This Kiukiang official: *my* blue jacket was soaked through!

NIGHT THOUGHTS ON THE TERRACE

By Wei Chuang (851-920)

Far through the night a tuneful harp is sighing;
Its strings are sorrowful with wind and rain.
A lonely lamp! a trumpet's echoes dying!
The pallid terrace moon is on the wane!

The fragrance of the grass is at an end;
The one I wait has left me here alone!
Alas, I have no messenger to send —
For southward all the autumn geese have flown!

THE FLUTE AT DAWN

By Chu-cheng (Tenth Century poetess)

Who dares to play his flute at dawn beneath my window?
When all the sleeping world is hooded still in shadow!
Alas, it roused me from my dreams and my forgetting,
And brought me back to this harsh world of futile fretting!

My heart now aches anew from hearing your voice singing—
Of that lost reverie the echoes still are ringing!
Strange that the music of a piping peasant boy
Should be the funeral dirge for all my dreams of joy!

THE BELLS OF CLOUD SPIRIT TEMPLE
By Yang Wan-li (1124-1206)

Where the bamboos are casting deep shadows,
  Thick grasses mat under the reeds;
Along the old path, long deserted,
  My way is quite hidden by weeds.

The kind, thoughtful breeze, when I weary,
  Leads me back to the road I had lost
By wafting me strains of sweet music,
  When the temple bells chime through the mist!

A BROOK SYMPHONY
By Hsin Ch'i-chi (1140-1207)

My shadow strolls with me past pool and brook;
  Blue sky lies mirrored deep in all the streams.
Above, white clouds float everywhere I look—
  And so we walk on drifting clouds, it seems!

I sing a merry tune — who answers me?
  A sweet voice echoing back through lonely dell.
Perhaps it comes from playful elf or fay!
  I listen to each cadence fade or swell—
  Then recognize the murmur of the rill,
Where pink peach petals float in harmony!

EVENING IN THE VILLAGE
By Lei Chen (Twelfth Century)

The pool is choked with reeds, chill whispering waves caress
    the brim;
  The sun is swallowed in the cleft that splits the rocky hill.
Astride his water buffalo the herd boy ambles home—
  His pipe's harsh tones but illy voice the music in his soul!

SACRILEGE
By Wang Shih-chen (1634-1700)

The east wind blows its perfumed breath upon the willow boughs,
Whose light green sprays mark out the pathway to the sacred bridge.
I break a plume to send to you in memory of old vows —
Along the stream the rain's shrill flutes bewail such sacrilege!

IN AN OLD LIBRARY
By Yuan Mei (1716-1797)

With jade-tipped cords ten thousand tomes are bound;
Bronze bowls of ancient Shang and urns of Chou
Stand here in silence — till there comes the sound
Of wind bells tinkling where fresh breezes blow!

Then faintly come the words the spring wind sings:
"Draw near and drink the essence of bouquets
Drawn from the fragrance of a thousand springs —
Here lie the souls of countless yesterdays!"

THE TWILIGHT FLUTE
By Huang Wan-ch'iung (Eighteenth Century poetess)

Clear pearls of dew adorn each green bamboo,
While breezes idly stir a lotus flower
To drop its pale pink petals on the pond.
I stroll in solitude
With twinkling fireflies as my retinue,
Till faintly through the dusk from lonely tower
I hear an eerie bamboo flute respond
To my despondent mood!

GOBLINS!

(A new translation of Victor Hugo's "Les Djinns")

By Alfred J. Wright, Jr.

Town, port,
And walls —
Resort
From squalls —
Seas gray
Which stay
Winds' play:
Night falls.

Far and high
Sounds a sprite,
Mournful sigh
In the night;
Hear it toll
Like a soul
From a dole
E'er in flight.

A higher cry
'S a bell that pings,
Of elfin spry
That darts and springs;
He dances, glides,
On one foot slides,
As on he strides
In rhythmic swings.

The clamor grows strong,
By echo rehearsed;
'Tis like to the gong
Of convent accursed,
Or noise of a crowd,

A rolling storm-cloud,
Now dull and now loud,
Now ready to burst.

The demons' ghastly blare! . . .
Their deadly band draws nigh;
Below the spiral stair
To refuge let us fly!
Already dies my light,
And blackest shade of night
Along the winding flight
Mounts up e'en to the sky.

'Tis the goblin host which pass
In their whistling, whirling pack!
And the yews their wings harass
As if burning timber crack.
Now their rapid, heavy swarm,
In its spin through space inform,
Seems the gloom before the storm
That brings lightning in its track.

They're here close by! Hold firm that door!
Within we'll try to stem their swell.
What noise outside! The dragon's roar,
And hideous vampires 'scaped from hell!
The beam, unfastened from the ramp,
Inclines, like grass beneath the damp;
The ancient door with rusty cramp
With all their force they strive to fell.

Infernal crying! Voice that shrieks and sobs!
The horrid herd, propelled by the gale's whoop —
God! let my house not fall before their throbs,
Though bulwark bend beneath the evil troop.
My dwelling groans as if to sink at last,
And one would say that from the earth unfast,
As withered leaf before the wint'ry blast,
The raging wind revolves it in its swoop!

O Prophet! From these demons vile
If you but aid me in my plight,
Forever my bald forehead I'll
Bow low before your sacred light!
Let firm these pious doors remain
Against their fiery breathing's bane
And may they pound their claws in vain
Upon these windows in the night!

They have passed! In haste the mob
Flies away; at last their feet
'Gainst my door have ceased to bob
With their palpitating beat.
Hear the air with clanging quake:
In the forest, in their wake,
All the great, old oak trees shake
'Neath their flight, oppressed with heat.

Now, as the flapping wanes,
Afar their winging weaves,
So jumbled in the plains,
So feeble one believes
To list to locusts' trill,
That chirp with voices shrill,
Or hear the hail a-drill
Above old leaden eaves.

What strange-sounding word
Still floats on the air,
As Arabs when heard
At hour of their prayer!
A song from the deeps
At moments still creeps,
And infant that sleeps
Dreams dreams that are fair.

The deathly elves,
Dark sons of night,
Back to their delves

Now haste their flight
Their scolding drowned
As waves profound
In murmur sound,
When not in sight.

This vague cry,
E'er decreased —
Wavelet's sigh,
Scarce released —
'Tis the plaint,
Growing faint,
Of a saint
For deceased.

I fear
Not night:
I hear
The flight;
The blast
Is past —
At last
No sprite.

HOUSEKEEPING

Clean as the orisons of parboiled saints
Was Aunt Matilda's house. Her parlor wore
A halo, and there always was the chance
Of slipping on its gleaming, glassy floor.

To Aunt Bess, though, it mattered little how
Much dust assailed *her* dingy architrave —
And of the two I think Aunt Bess may now
Enjoy more comfort in the dusty grave.

— *John Nixon, Jr.*

The Art of Lionel Johnson

By A. BRONSON FELDMAN

> Stern is the faith of art, right stern, and he
> Loved her severity.
> Momentous things he prized, gradual and fair
> Births of a passionate air.

Whenever I think of Lionel Johnson my memory echoes the response of Hamlet to Horatio's outcry on the weird event at Elsinore. You recall the outcry: "O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!" Then the Prince's response: "And therefore, as a stranger, give it welcome." There is a manifestation of the soul of Lionel Johnson in the valiant intelligence of that line. For young Johnson was distinguished among the geniuses of England and his century by the way he always welcomed the stranger in thought and art. For readiness and breadth of mental hospitality he had few equals in the literature of his time. In the handful of rare volumes bequeathed to us by the untimely silenced youth there are more things heavenly and earthly than were dreamt of in the philosophy of most of his fellow Victorians.

Naturally he suffered from — and frequently revelled in — strong prejudices. He was both tormented and amused by his spontaneous antagonisms, which reminded him of the union of logic and rage in his great namesake, Samuel the Rambler. How cordially Lionel admired the method in argument of Samuel Johnson, we see in the quaint sonnet, "Doctor Major," written in the old Tory's own rhetoric. I have no evidence of consanguinity between them otherwise. The younger man's mind ranged farther than the lexicographer's. Lionel's intellect displayed a scope more generous and profound than the synthetic sapience of Herbert Spencer, the foremost English philosopher of his period. He could appreciate the pragmatic sterling in Spencer; but the professional sage could never truly esteem the poet. The intellectual fellowship of young Johnson could not be defined

better than by the terms he himself used to define the comradeship of the classics. The immortals of literature, he wrote, in *The Art of Thomas Hardy* (1894), "of all ages and in all tongues, are a catholic company; in their fellowship is room for comers from the four winds, laden with infinitely various gifts and treasures." Johnson was grateful for these gifts and treasures even when their bringers contradicted certain of his dearest beliefs. Deeply religious and metaphysical, he cherished the friendship of the godless John Davidson, the poet of modern materialism. Although Lionel led a cloistral life, he ventured into public glare for the right of Ireland to secede from the English empire. Yet he stood among the earliest critics to welcome the militant imperial Kipling as a poet and storyteller, despite the newcomer's enmity toward Irish independence. Johnson, says one of his posthumous editors, Thomas Whittemore, had a genius for friendship. Nothing human, nothing natural seemed alien to him.

As in thought, so in art, he was perpetually attracted by the uncommon, the adventurous, the new. He never tired of quoting the saying of Francis Bacon, which was so precious to the heart of Poe: "There is no excellent Beauty, that hath not some strangeness in the proportion." Both in the content and the form of his prose and verse Johnson always introduced that element of wonder, the prime ingredient of romance. "I can think of nothing," he once declared, "so beyond hope deformed, so past endurance dreadful, but art could show it to me, humanized, and brought within the pale of beauty."

At an early age he walked in the forefront of the movement for the revival of the Platonic temper in literature, the English Hellenism heralded by Swinburne, Symonds, and his beloved teacher Pater. At the same time he championed the endeavors of Newman and Manning to restore England to the Roman creed, and thus helped to bring back to the English lyric the lost ardors and austerities of the Jesuit singer, Robert Southwell, and the Anglican singers, Vaughan, Herbert, and Traherne. To the passions for Platonism and "Popery," Johnson united an enthusiasm for

the pagan magic of ancient Celtic art. The legends and landscapes of Wales and Cornwall found in him perhaps the best of their modern bards. He also chanted in the vanguard of the men and women who defended the sovereignty of Ireland in political and poetic life. He was a stanch friend of William Butler Yeats and Katherine Tynan, and sang the praises of Parnell, despite the damnation of Parnell by Rome. But Johnson could discover a kind word for the Devil himself, and carve the kindness in Latin verse. (See the lyric, "Satanas," dedicated to his friend Jorge Santayana, in his *Poetical Works,* 1917.)

To these enthusiasms for the Hellenic, the Catholic, and the Celtic, the marvelous boy joined an unwavering admiration for the culture of the age that revered John Locke, flattered the Walpoles, and rejected Chatterton! Lionel was never so enchanted by the faery lore of Ireland, or the seraphic ritual of Rome, or the dialectic muse of Athens, that he became oblivious of the arid charms of eighteenth-century Britain, the century of common-sense. He stood solitary among the esthetes at the beginning of the twentieth century precisely because of his odd delight in the mock-classicism of the world of Goldsmith and Gray. He declared that in the vilest literary product of that world he nevertheless discerned "something of urbanity, atticism, grace, composure, ease; some felicity of arrangement or charm of manner." From the roses and raptures of his own period Johnson turned with pleasure to the "Augustan" ghosts whose company he celebrated in his poem, "Oxford Nights"—

> With Gray, whose gracious spirit knew
> The sorrows of art's lonely few;
> With Fielding, great, and strong, and tall;
> Sterne, exquisite, equivocal;
> Goldsmith, the dearest of them all.

In all his writings young Johnson strove for Augustan accuracy and discipline of passion, ever mindful of the impulse to secure in art the "strangeness in the proportion" of which Bacon spoke. For to the intelligence of Johnson, devoted to faith in metaphysics and magic, there was some-

thing strange, even perverse, in common-sense! Consequently the most rational of his rimes invariably contained at least one note of mystery. But the most mysterious of his poems go bereft of logic, just like the old Gaelic incantations he loved to recite. It is in his critical writing, rather than his poetry, that we see the influence of the Age of Reason on his amazing mind.

The boy was born in Kent, at the town of Broadstairs, on March 15, 1867. His lineage was mainly English and Welsh, with a strain from Ireland that he was especially proud of, so proud that he used to call himself an Irishman. His parents were devout members of the Established Church of England, and Lionel grew up in an atmosphere of almost stifling piety. The spirit of rebellion against his father's faith took a very peculiar form, turning him during his stay at Winchester College into a passionate believer in Buddhism. He was enraptured by Edwin Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia,* and confided to a friend that he felt "absolutely confirmed" in Buddhism by reading Plato! In the *Winchester Letters* (1919) where we find this confession we also learn that, at another period of his life, he called himself a follower of Swedenborg. Whatever creed he felt attracted to, it appears to have been dogma instead of ritual that drew him. And the dogma had to leave plenty of space for the mystical bent of his genius, his eternally restless intelligence. His father was horrified by the boy's insistence on the fundamental harmony of the religions of Galilee and the Ganges, and forbade all correspondence between Lionel and the students of Buddhism at Winchester. How lonely the young man felt in the circle of his family, we learn from one of his most melancholy letters:

"You can scarcely understand how intensely I live alone: how alien and strange and laughable everything appears to me but myself . . . I have been told by people who have been my friends that I am naturally, by birth, devoid of so-called conscience and moral instinct: I never really know when I am absolutely sincere in thought: but in tastes and actions I am perfectly consistent and sincere. Accordingly I live my own life." Another letter admits that his isolation was not

so perfect as he might have wished. A loving cousin labored to intervene, and became "the only member of my family to whom I can really disclose myself."

The sincerity of his tastes and actions at Winchester would have made him innumerable enemies if it had not so often assumed the shape of a gentle masquerade. His soft answers turned away wrath, and his soft laughter changed wrath into tolerance. Little Lionel was convinced that "life is exquisitely humorous, even in its miseries"; he affirmed to a school acquaintance, "I tell you as God's truth that the mystery of pain is merely the mark of joy, that all things are full of joy and audacious revelry: that Artemus Ward and Thomas à Kempis are brothers." Among the merriest moments of the comedy of celestial masochism that was his life at college were the times that he played Shakespeare on the Wykeham stage, always performing feminine roles.

He wrote for the *Wykehamist,* and earnestly debated in his soul the problem whether he should become a priest or a poet. For a long while he lived with the resolution to take holy orders in the Anglican Church. Nobody knows why he changed his mind. When he went to Oxford he had already resolved to be and die a poet. Probably it was the unconquerable fear of living ever in parochial eyes that defeated his ambition to become a bishop. His heart's craving for solitude surely exerted a determining force on his selection of a career. Melancholy, he said, "melancholy marked me for her own, and wanted to write sonnets on her tender and shivering graces." All his songs bear her signet.

At Oxford he emerged a disciple of Walter Pater, whose *Marius the Epicurean* he hailed as "the perfection of beautiful literature . . . a book to love and worship." Under Pater's delicate guidance Johnson studied the classics with a fervor that earned him outstanding honors on his graduation from New College.

The growing pains of his body gave him bad dreams at the University, and although he sometimes talked about the charms of insomnia, he fought the disease in the strongest ways he could attempt. He used to read and write until dawn. Once a physician temporarily relieved him of despair

by counselling a trial of alcohol. The luckless boy soon fell victim to the ravages of the drink he despised. Under the spells of nightmare and liquor Johnson's night transformed into day. He slept while the sun shone and renewed his waking life after the moon rose. The nature of the thoughts which kept his eyes open in anguish at night, he quietly held to himself.

When he came down to London to make his living as a literary critic, his life was already near to brimming with fantasy. He scarcely knew more of the world than the Lady of Shalott had known from her looking-glass. Johnson wished to spend the rest of his hours in contemplation or dream. His long silences frightened even his most romantic intimates. They may have sensed that his nightly victories over the allurements of madness — the unexplained protection of genius for its brains — had something uncanny and monstrous in them. He sustained a truly terrible grip on reality. "Johnson," Yeats remarked, "you are the only man I know whose silence has beak and claw." It was like the silence of that stoic bird, the eagle of Rome, in whose final religion he anchored his soul.

He dressed in an extremely conventional fashion, and wrote with unfaltering tact for such orthodox periodicals as The Spectator and The Academy, blatant journals like the Pall Mall Gazette, the Daily Chronicle, and Henley's National Observer, as well as such butterfly-like magazines as the Pageant, the Savoy, and the Yellow Book. He joined the Rhymers Club, founded by Yeats and Ernest Rhys, those clarions of the Celtic renascence, and seldom missed a meeting of the club despite its blue density of church-warden pipes and the tireless controversies of Yeats, John Davidson, Arthur Symons, and other members with peculiar appetites for generalities and abstract cerebration. Lionel and his friend Herbert Horne maintained a pale conviction that all ideas must be vain that could be successfully dragged into debate. If there was anything in the world that could provoke a sparkle of hatred in Johnson's soul, it was "cold scientific intellect," the kind of mind attracted to what he called "vivisection." On the rare occasions when he raised

his voice at Winchester in anger he used to denounce the young grinders of brains on the whetstone of logic, the noisy "Nothingarians," as he styled them. At Oxford he mercilessly attacked the Positivists, the rather humorless youths whom he regarded as simple eyeless toilers at the Stuart Mill with slaves. The only way that Pater could teach him to respect political economy was to express the passions that inspired the dismal science. And when Johnson's adoration of Oscar Wilde was converted to hatred, it was mainly because he discovered in Wilde a "cold, corrupting fate," a frigidity and erosive force of pure reason, more mechanical than human. (See his sonnet against Wilde, "The Destroyer of a Soul," in the *Poetical Works*. The soul alleged to be destroyed was that of Lord Alfred Douglas.) Johnson's conventional manners and courtesy were not sufficient armor to prevent such arctic intellects from hurting him to the edge of madness. Therefore he isolated himself from the metropolis as far as he could isolate himself and still earn his daily bread. "In my library," he told Yeats, "I have all the knowledge of the world that I need." And so mighty and fierce was his desire for knowledge of mankind that he made his home one large library — and he wondered if it might not be possible to find some mode of hanging bookshelves from the ceilings!

The main events of his short life are soon told. In 1891, on St. Alban's day, he was welcomed by St. Ethelreda's church into the Roman fold. In 1895 he published, at the Bodley Head press of John Lane, his first volume, *Poems*. The year before, he issued his unexcelled commentary on the novels of the wizard of Wessex, *The Art of Thomas Hardy*. In 1897 appeared his *Ireland, with Other Poems,* his last book. He was compelled to move from the rooms in Charlotte Street which he had shared with the poets Selwyn Image and Herbert Horne. Yeats thought his removal was caused by the dread that he would knock down a lamp or a candle in one of his alcohol spells and so burn the whole house. He transferred his possessions to Gray's Inn, and from the Inn to cheerless chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He could not stop the damned drinking. "I do not want to be

cured," he announced. Finally the habit restricted him to his rooms by day and night until, on September 29, 1902, he had to leave his apartment to visit a pub. Here the doomed young man fell from a stool into a torpor and a fever that ended only with his death on October 4. He was thirty-five years old. At the autopsy the coroner found that Lionel Johnson had ceased to grow after his fifteenth year, except in the brain. His body lies in St. Mary's cemetery, in Kendal Green.

There was no woman in the poet's life after he left his mother for the last time, to journey to Oxford. He boasted of his chastity to his friends, and was fond of sermoning poor Ernest Dowson on the charms of purity in sex. Yet one of Johnson's most powerful poems, the famous "Dark Angel," utters *de profundis* a yearning for sin. He expressed to Yeats on one memorable occasion a feeling of sympathy with Wilde's lust for self-degradation, the desire to go down for the sheer joy of the shameless into that group of beggars and blackmailers where Wilde went in quest of Platonic love. Yeats stared at the chaste youth in dismay, and Johnson smiled — "as though he spoke of psychological depths I could never enter." In his Winchester correspondence he frequently remarked on the fascinations of evil. Nevertheless his sole vice remained the demonic drinking.

Vice is hardly the word for his practice of quoting from imaginary conversations with Cardinal Newman and other renowned men. These little harmless lies were the products of an overflowing wit and fantasy, in the spirit of that feigning glorified by Wilde's essay, "The Decay of Lying." They were evidences of the lonesome young man's fellowship with the lunatic, the lover, and the poet. Apart from questions of theology, Johnson's life would have satisfied the sternest of Miltonic thinkers. He was a sort of Roman Catholic puritan.

His spirit was married to literature in the way that St. Francis was wedded to his Lady Poverty. Johnson existed just to read and to write. Yet there was almost nothing of the bookworm, the pedant, in his blood: no critic could complain that his writings were mere results of a *cacoethes scribendi.* The generosity of his mind to fresh experience,

the clarity of his outlook on the world, enabled Johnson to find distinctions between reality and illusion where a man of more numerous fortunes and misfortunes and less luminous intellect would have found only a terrific mixture of fantasy and fact. In short, Johnson was not simply a reader and a writer: he was a *seer*. The books he loved held faithful mirrors up to nature. His own books possess a wealth of truth.

Lionel Johnson is chiefly remembered today for his poetry. His complete verse has not been gathered into a single volume. Some of it lies scattered in extinct periodicals and uncollected letters. But we have his best in the edition of the *Poetical Works* issued by Elkin Mathews in 1915. The principles of poetry that he cherished are briefly noted in his Winchester correspondence. He insisted that "Art is intensely scientific, poetry has laws." These laws compelled the true artist to maintain strict forms and modes of communicating his emotions. Of course the artist revealed his mastery by the skill with which he concealed his travails over structure and design. Johnson was pitiless to poets who made design and structure their primary concern. To his religion of literature devotion to the letter and the line was nothing but deadly. The first requirement of a poem for him was "the necessary foundation of natural instinct," that is, passion. The phrase occurs in a criticism of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, a criticism of wonderful acuteness, coming from a lad of seventeen. He voiced his theory of art in the following outburst:

"There is nothing on earth — perhaps not even music, not even painting — of equal divinity with a single line of pure word-music, a single thought caught from passing emotions and changing aspects, and fashioned into the beauty of a phrase — there is nothing equally sovereign with poetry."

Naturally, for such a rhapsodist, the quintessence of poetry was to be discovered in the lyric. At bottom Johnson agreed with the doctrine of Poe that there could be no such thing as a long poem, since a poem had to be a work of ecstasy. And Johnson would have agreed with Poe's hostility to the "heresy of the didactic." Still, the English poet

would have protested that a real poet was also a teacher. He wanted to instruct the people in religion, in ethics, and the pursuit of beauty. Yeats failed to see the difference between Johnson's doctrine that poets were teachers and the dogma that literature must be didactic. The two friends fought many a wit-combat over the matter, without converting each other. When the Irish bard could bring himself, for instance, to praise Walt Whitman, it was exclusively for the sake of the American's utterance of pain or bliss. Johnson, on the other hand, admired Whitman because the Yankee singer "takes this world and shows that nothing is common or unclean." Johnson loved Goethe's *Faust* because at the end the hero begins to drain waste lands, to serve humanity instead of self. The boy Johnson even hoped to reach "ignorant peasantry, vulgar bourgeois, and ridiculous aristocrats," with his songs! *Mirabile dictu,* in a manner he succeeded, as I shall try to demonstrate.

His verse lures curiosity by its combination of traditional metres with extraordinary rime patterns, archaic vocabulary with the boldest modern imagery. He spells chant "Chaunt" and uses the word "lets" meaning hindrances, as well as "conceits," in the sense of Shakespeare's age. Without a tremor Lionel executed the inversion "Sleep they well" in his lyric "Trentals," and the inversion "Snows the land cover" in his carol for Christmas. His feeling for melody went unoffended by the startling pentameter with which he broke the organ rhythms of his blank verse monolog "Julian at Eleusis":

> Chance and change; change and chance! strange chance, hard change.

Gerard Manley Hopkins never dared dissonance like this. Many of Johnson's lines appear to defy scansion in the same way. But every variation of his metre was deliberate, and he sometimes gave the impression of working for nothing more than the "virtuoso bliss" of inventing new rhythms, new stanzas. He became radiantly happy, he said, at the discovery of a new form of verse. It is the imagery of Johnson, however, that endears him to those who care for poetry in our day — those who care for articulate, rhythmic, magi-

cal beauty, I mean, not the lovers of extravagant, soliloquacious unprose. Johnson's princely taste, his graceful scholarship, saved him from the follies of "free," or libertine, anarchic verse. Thus his finest lines and phrases have the marmoreal spell of the Greek immortals. He has also left us phrases and lines of a burning modernity. There is an Aeschylean splendor in the couplet,

> Armored he rides, his head
> Bare to the stars of dawn,

depicting the statue of the martyred King Charles I at Charing Cross. In the same volume containing these two Hellenic lines we encounter a couplet that must have inspired T. S. Eliot in the making of his "Hollow Men." This is the couplet:

> And this is Death's dreamland to me,
> Led hither by a star.
> (From "In Falmouth Harbour."

Compare Eliot's poem with its lines about "death's dream kingdom" visioned "Under the twinkle of a fading star." Johnson's influence on Eliot is considerable, but greater by far on Eliot's teacher, Ezra Pound, who has often acknowledged the spell of Lionel on his poetry. Pound contributed a eulogy as preface to the *Poetical Works* of Johnson in 1915, and wrote a line of pity and praise for him in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920). Worthy of note is the echo of some cadences in Johnson's lyric, "Mystic and Cavalier," which may be clearly heard in Pound's poem, "A Virginal." The parallel is unmistakable. Here are two lines from the latter:

> No, no! Go from me. I have left her lately . . .
> For my surrounding air has a new lightness . . .

And here are four lines from Johnson's lyric:

> Go from me: I am one of those who fall.
> What! hath no cold wind swept your heart at all,
> In my sad company? . . .
> Yours are the victories of light . . .

On the other hand, the finger and voice of Yeats are plainly

discernible in page after page of Johnson's songs about Ireland, and his songs for her saints. It was through the power that he wielded in the destinies of Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, that Johnson succeeded in reaching the minds of the "ignorant peasantry, vulgar bourgeois, and ridiculous aristocrats," — not to mention the desperate proletarians — whom he desired as audience for his art.

The majority of Johnson's poems are revisited, even by admirers, with reluctance, because of the chill that lingers in them, indeed the odor of death. We can cheerfully bear what Louise Imogen Guiney called his "Latin strictness and asceticism," when the ascetic severity is felt as passionate self-defense against the temptation to wrong and violence. But we cannot long bear the breath of winter that streams from so many of his songs, in particular the love songs. "Latin strictness" alone will not account for the icy sterility in them. Their very titles communicate their bleakness: "A Burden of Easter Vigil," "A Death," "At the Burial of Cardinal Manning," "Dead" (there are two lyrics with this title), "Ireland's Dead," "Light! For the Stars Are Pale," "Morning Twilight," "The Dark Angel," "The Darkness," "The Gloom" . . . Yeats informs us that his friend's best poetry is "natural and impassioned," but the passions that usually prevail are sorrow and remorse; the singer is forever grieving. He envied Heinrich Heine his glory of being able to laugh in pain. His nickname for Heine was "laughing Christ." The sources of the English poet's woe have been lost under the reticence of his childhood friends. All we know of them is that he frequently wandered away from his father's house, where the genial currents of his soul were frozen, and spent hours in churchyards, "and even, when possible, vaults and charnel-houses," in order to commune with their phantoms, "to force the paraphernalia of death to unfold their secret." Perhaps it was the passion for consorting with ghosts that induced the dominance of white among the colors in Johnson's poetry, a dominance that has attracted the attention of several critics, particularly the historian of Johnson's era, Holbrook Jackson. Psychoanalytic materialism would probably trace the poet's

sentiment for whiteness to his mother's bosom, or at least the gown in which she came to his cradle at night. Starvation for maternal love surely promoted his conversion to the mother-church of Rome. The flame of his favorite color fused in his imagination the starkness of death and the purity of life. Thinking of white, he could feel his soul sheltered under the wings of the "White Angels Around Christ," glowing tranquil under the "Light from the Light of Light."

Johnson was not without the gift of laughter, but he exhibited it more in his prose than in his verse. He contributed an excellent prose satire on decadent poetry to the first number of The Pageant, a satire entiled "Incurable," which contains a delicious parody of the kind of songs on sex and suicide that Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons were making fashionable in the 1890s. Here is a quatrain from the parody:

> Her body music is: and ah!
> The accords of lute and viola
> When she and I
> Play on live limbs love's opera.

The sole poem in his published works that shows us a jolly soul is the sonnet on Samuel Johnson which I mentioned before. A verse eulogy of Charles Lamb says much about joy and merriment but is actually a celebration of saintliness. When Johnson sings of sitting in fancy at the table of the Vicar of Wakefield, or listening to Tobias Smollett's chapters of "Matthew Bramble's pleasant wrath," or pronounces his happiness in the humors of Sir Roger de Coverley, and other amusing gentlemen of the eighteenth century, we are more impressed with the picture of the solitary poet in his library than with the evocation of the comic figures he read about. There is certainly no joy in the lines he dedicated to the joys of the grape, "Vinum Daemonum" — no joy at all, only a delirium and repressed tears.

It is a relief to turn from Johnson's sad failures in poetry to his sad triumphs. Unquestionably he donated to England a few of her deathless lyrics. The song "To Morfydd" with its haunting refrain,

> Oh! what are the winds?
> And what are the waters?
> Mine are your eyes!

will live forever, even though its students have learned from Yeats that Johnson lied about its creation, claiming that he obtained the magic tercet from a Welsh ballad. Yeats explains the falsehood as the result of an irresistible wish of the poet to hide the fact that he shared in the primitive Gaelic emotion. Equally permanent are the verses "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross," which will always move us, including our remorseless democrats, with its perfect Dantesque cadences:

> Ye, when the city sleeps;
> When all the cries are still:
> The stars and heavenly deeps
> Work out a perfect will.

If this quatrain reminds us of Dante's line, "*In la sua volontade e nostra pace,*" it is only to endow the words of Johnson with another radiance. Likewise, when we recall a great song by Goethe in reading Johnson's piece, "The Precept of Silence," concerning the knowledge of divine powers attained through hunger and loneliness, we are not disturbed by thoughts of plagiarism; we sense an exaltation by thoughts of an emotion all men have known. At Johnson's best his songs always recall the lyrics of past masters. But the recollection is not merely of literature but of life. His songs only seem to be made of ink; the truth is they are made of blood. The ode to "Ocean Hazard: Gypsy" brings to view the genius of George Borrow; yet simultaneously it brings to mind the airs and aromas of genuine gypsy campfires and gyspy melodies. Louise Guiney pointed out that the final couplet of "The Dark Angel" seems to have been derived from Plotinus:

> Lonely, unto the Lone I go;
> Divine, to the Divinity.

What she failed to point out besides was the fact that the couplet presents the neo-Platonic idea with a music and precision that Plotinus would have extolled as a vibration from God. The idea has experienced in Johnson's crystal art a change into something richer and stranger than any of the Greek philosopher's scriptures.

For the sake of such transmutations and lesser miracles among Johnson's other poems, we readily forgive his faults, so aptly described by Miss Guiney as resembling the roof of the Cathedral of Milan — "gone to seed with pinnacles" — full of "vowelled surprises, and exquisitely devotional elaborations," too frigidly intellectual for the ordinary reader's comfort. These defects, and the virtues from which they are inseparable, place Lionel Johnson with the English bards' group which includes William Collins and Matthew Arnold. He predicted at the very outset of his career that he would "turn out a kind of Matthew Arnold . . ." True, he lacks Arnold's breadth of vision, his ability to get the sensation of flower and bird on the page. But Arnold might have envied Johnson's ability to carve poems that function splendidly as touchstones of immortal verse, phrases of incomparable shine and strength.

As I have indicated, a good many of Johnson's poems are celebrations of the delights of books. We may generally describe his critical prose in these words, too. He could not, however, follow his native tendency and make all his critical endeavors a series of adventures among masterpieces. After all, he was a professional book-reviewer. His genius permitted him to treat the criticism of bad books as an adventure toward the comprehension of masterworks, and so made almost all his tasks in prose a pleasure. Few of his contemporaries had his happy power of combining absolute honesty of judgment with sweet encouragement to superior effort. Naturally there were limits that even his generosity could not transcend. For example, he considered the erotic Ovid (the favorite poet of Shakespeare) worthless. Johnson voiced a strong dislike of Macaulay as "a man of slippery antithesis" who never went "to the heart of anything above mediocrity." Does not the heart of mediocrity deserve study and art's loving care? The big Whig's agile judicious handling of hot questions annoyed Johnson as "Laodicean." In pursuit of certitudes himself he was vexed by Macaulay's enjoyment of compromises. The poet preferred downrightness even when it was down-wrongness, or what he believed was violent error.

The Catholic Johnson wrote extremely warm praise of the Roman atheist Lucretius. The author of *The Nature of Things,* he said, was "the Michael Angelo of verse, a Titanic workman, compelling language to obey his sovereign will, and fall into majestic cadence, thunderous, oceanic." Defending Lucretius from infamy, Johnson did not hesitate to contradict St. Jerome. The Saint had said *The Nature of Things* was composed in lucid intervals of insanity. Impossible! cried the English critic: "there is definite beauty in Lucretius," and a grandeur of mental industry without its like in world literature. Wherever he found beauty Johnson found a kindred soul, and he had the heart and nerve to overlook heresy and defiance of all theology so long as they sprang from the energy of art, of men and women to whom the universe was terrible and dear.

His best known work of criticism is *The Art of Thomas Hardy.* This book, the first of a multitude concerning the fertility of Hardy, was published in 1894 and found enough favor to bring out a second edition in 1923. Although its hero had not yet shown the world in 1894 his stature as a poet, and had not concluded his prose canon with *Jude the Obscure,* Johnson's volume may truthfully be said to come close to pronouncing the ultimate word on Hardy as an artist.

The *Art* opens with a chapter of "Critical Preliminaries" in which Johnson expounds his fundamentals of esthetics. The theory may be summed up in his own words: "The most enduring things, in a world of growth and change," he states, "are the human passions and the human sentiments: it is the office of good literature, the distinction of classical literature, to give form in every age to the age's human mind." We observe that Johnson conceived of the human mind as primarily an existence of passion and sentiment. Yeats tells us how he angered Johnson by asserting that art existed for emotion alone. The English poet firmly believed that emotion signified disaster if it went without the control, the sovereignty of reason. Reason or intellect, in his view, was the power that gave form to passion and sentiment: "it requires," he declared, "no less than a science, to lay at rest

questions of the artistic conscience." Unfortunately he felt no urge to develop the principles of this science. He practically contented himself with the bare idea that it indicated the techniques of uniting substance and form. "The desire of the artist for perfection is an excellent thing," he mused, but great writers, he was convinced, must have great faults. The artist was duty-bound to continue the vital traditions of his teachers, the old masters, and at the same time he was obliged to be faithful to the spirit or ruling current of his age. Between the cliffs of antiquity and the surf of experiment, artists could not hope to escape errors, and sometimes shipwreck. The classic, then, was the work that surmounted the temptations of the merely contemporary as well as the seductions to servility toward the old masters. For example, Johnson took up the *Faery Queen.* Spenser, he contended, had unhappily "a false deference to antiquity; he misapprehended alike the needs of his own age, and the lessons of the great past. But when he came to himself, he showed a triumphant apprehension of both: and in the *Faery Queen,* the spirit of old romance, and the spirit of new times, met together without discord." Such harmony of the living elements of old fiction and new fact Johnson discovered in the novels of Hardy.

How sharp the critical vision of Lionel Johnson was may well be seen in his discernment of the architectural qualities of Hardy's books. He guessed they were the outcome of some intimate acquaintance with architectural theory and work. We now know that the wizard of Wessex had trained to be an architect before he turned his hand to literature. We also know that he told the public nothing of his past but what they might find out in his novels. The key to such exploration is given by Shakespeare in the confessional sonnet telling how the dyer's hand (Hardy would have said the reddleman's hand) is subdued to what it works in. The architect's hand of Hardy was clearly visible to young Johnson in the simple and cathedral designs of the great Wessex stories, in the "frozen music" of Hardy's prose. And the trade-subdued hand was just as visible in Hardy's defects of style. Johnson frowned with amusement on the novelist's portrait

of Eustacia Vye's mouth in profile, because of this infelicity of architectural metaphor: "her lips formed, with almost geometric precision, the curve so well known in the arts of design as the cima-recta, or ogee." Without amusement Johnson frowned on the technical detail which Hardy intruded in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* while describing what Angel Clare saw when he looked on the towers of Winchester, waiting for the hour of his wife's disgraceful death. Hardy writes that the broken-hearted Angel saw buildings "as in an isometric drawing." That sort of freezing observation from an author too well educated in the arts of design was coupled by Johnson with the type of contrivance by which Hardy fondly enfeebled his plots, the contrivance of assembling characters in a single scene in grotesque contrast with each other, as in a frieze. The pseudo-comic symmetry was unpleasant to the critic because he felt that a creator's mockery of his own creatures sinned against the light of love, its essential goodwill toward flesh and blood. Johnson would not have forgiven Hardy's cold-blooded ironies of coincidence if they had not been overwhelmed in the currents of the stories by the novelist's infinite compassion for the victims. The imp of the perverse in Hardy distressed his admirer: "something unkind," Johnson remarked, "an uncanny sort of pleased and sly malevolence, looks out upon me from many a page, and stops the laughter." The gargoyle grin, however, remained integral with the "Latin massiveness" of the novels, and their blemishes of sadistic fantasy only cast in acuter relief the sanity and candescence of their truths.

The liveliest chapters in the *Art* are the central chapters, entitled "Wessex" and "Country Folk" — page after page of intellectual revelry in Hardy's pageantry of Dorsetshire, the earth and the mankind and womankind with whom he was most heartily at home in thought. Johnson noted how active a part in the novelist's *dramatis personae* was played by circumstances which in lesser artists would have been just background; how Egdon Heath functioned dramatically in *The Return of the Native,* how the city of Casterbridge dominated the tragedy of Mayor Henchard. Hardy's love

for Wessex, the love that can chastise with internal grief, his honest love of her soul and soil, is communicated by the critic in language as beautiful and severe as Hardy's own speech. Above all, Johnson drives heartward the lesson of the master, "how to write of provincial ways without provincialism," how to point out the cosmic in the midst of the familiar. "The country folk of Mr. Hardy," says Johnson in concluding his study, "with their Wessex homes and labours, are the material of his great achievements; of these he is a master, and his work in this kind will surely stand the test of time. It is the work of long thought about familiar things: the two conditions of the best writing." The merging of this common and sublime material with a sense of form "Roman and massive," an austerity of structure and firmness of rhythm in every way worthy of the Wessex themes and folklore, made Thomas Hardy, in Johnson's opinion, not just a superb English artist but an artist for the ages.

The two collections of Johnson's criticism edited by Thomas Whittemore and Robert Shafer display just as brilliantly and durably as *The Art of Thomas Hardy* their author's breadth of comprehension and what Keats designated as "depth of taste." They prove that Johnson deserved the crowning judgment that Professor Samuel Chew wrote for Hazlitt, declaring that Hazlitt's appraisals of contemporary literature "more often than not indicate the direction which the judgment of posterity was to take." For instance, Johnson's review of Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads* and *The Light that Failed*. This was no ephemeral article; it was classic justice. The critic experienced no dismay at the Anglo-Indian newcomer's vulgarity and strained effects, his imperialist hysterics and boyish flings at philosophy. The cloistral Johnson recognized in Kipling the authentic voice of multitudes, an exhilarating voice, singing the modern romance of the Westerner in the Far East and the steam-conquest of ancient seas. If Kipling had submitted his native art, so profuse, so unpremeditated, to the discipline of Johnson's friendly criticism — but why mourn over spilt ink? Genius has its own laws and goes its own ways.

Let us be glad that Kipling produced the lyrics and tales that Johnson welcomed, and let us rejoice in the perennial freshness of the latter's reviews. The same mind that found the true measure of Kipling saw the real stature of John Davidson, when that poor titan was struggling for a foothold in Fleet Street. And lovers of the novels of Meredith as well as lovers of fair play and far-fathoming insight in criticism will always value Johnson's review of Meredith's *One of Our Conquerors*. He demonstrated that the novel was the reasonable outgrowth of the writer's knowledge and humor, rather than the eccentric explosion that most critics called it. Meredith's views on marriage did not hurt the Catholic critic so long as they moved in concord with the grain of his novel, emerged as thoughts cresting waves of reality, and not stridences interrupting the vital rhythm. Tendentious topics in works of art made Johnson irritable and sad. He branded their manifestation as "horrid dissonance," and wished that artists would leave such violations of the autonomy of the individual (the reader) to orators and newspaper editors. He expressed his outrage in a splendid attack on Byron's so-called "serious" poetry. Rhetoric he hated, because it was the language of arrogance, of frosty aggression. The spirit of art, Johnson believed all his life, is a spirit of peace.

In an age like ours, more sick, more split in conscience, more turbulent and menacing than the darkest years of Lionel Johnson's life, we need the consolations of a critic like him. Fractions of the glory of his verse survive for us in the broken images of T. S. Eliot and the nebulous rhapsodies of Yeats. But we lack the glory of Johnson's prose, the illumination of ihs criticism. "A sad friend of Truth" he was, like Shakespeare's Dane, but like him, too, a joyous friend of Fiction, capable of being bounded in a nutshell and still considering himself a king of infinite space. As orthodox as Hamlet and Dante, Lionel Johnson mounts to their altitudes of art by virtue of his generosity to new thoughts, new enterprises of young minds, his readiness to greet strangers in science and literature. Like Dante and Shakespeare, he en-

joyed this mental hospitality and never despaired with it, never felt his inner self threatened by apparitions of the future, for his soul also lived in concord with

> the prophetic soul
> Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

DEW

By Gabriela Mistral

(*Translated by Edna Lue Furness*)

This was a rose
replete with dew:
this was my heart
with my own son.

I join its leaves
him to sustain:
the wind years' way
leaves him untouched

He came one night
from the vast sky:
he has by love
his breath sustained.

The rose remains
tranquil, tranquil:
there is no rose
more marvelous.

This was a rose
replete with dew:
this was my heart
with my own son.

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Sor Juana After Three Hundred Years

The Mexican Phoenix

By GEORGE DAVENPORT YANTIS

On the twelfth of November, 1951, Mexico celebrated the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of Sor Juana, her most famous woman poet. Juana Ramírez de Asbaje is better known to the world by her title in religion, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. She was born in 1651 at San Miguel de Nepantla, a village about forty miles southeast from Mexico City. Here, in a land colored by the tropical sun, lay towns and cities that had been founded in the dim past by Indians whose descendants still peopled their streets. Great fields of sugar cane were tended by Negroes whose songs were to be echoed in the *villancicos* that Juana Ramírez would one day write to be sung in the churches of Puebla and Mexico City. Over all and close at hand stood the two great mountains, Popocatépetl, always belching smoke, Ixtaccíhuatl, crowned with everlasting snows.

The life this woman was to lead would be a short one, somewhat less than forty-five years; yet before it was over, she was known throughout the Hispanic world as the Tenth Muse, and after her death she was hailed as the Mexican Phoenix.

Juana was not quite three when she learned to read. This we know from a letter which she wrote at about the age of forty; and it is pleasant to be able to add that the poet's first teacher lived to see and know her pupil's fame. All her life she was pursued by the passion for learning and letters which showed itself thus early. She was only six or seven when she begged to be sent to Mexico City in order that she might attend the university. But her sex as well as her age was against her, and she had to be content with reading in her grandfather's library.

Juana's grandfather, Don Pedro Ramírez, lived nearby on the hacienda of Panoayán, which he had leased for three lifetimes from the vicar and members of the Dominican monastery. We do not know much about this hacienda, except that it lay within the bounds of Amecameca, somewhat to the north of the town. It seems to have abounded in mulatto slaves, ever willing and ready to minister to the comfort of those who lived upon it. Panoayán must have been a very desirable property, for the annual rental was nothing less than two hundred pesos. We know that during her childhood Juana spent much time here on Don Pedro's estate, browsing among his books.

Amecameca was approximately three miles from Nepantla, and it is still a good-sized little city; you would perhaps be inclined to call it a thriving country town. When Cortés first saw it he estimated the population at about twenty thousand. In Sor Juana's time it was an important stopping place on the road from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Incoming viceroys saw it before they saw the capital; all the traffic from Madrid and Seville to Mexico City passed through its streets. It was no self-contained provincial town: you could not live there without being intensely aware of the great city in the vale of Anáhuac.

While still very young, Juana went to live in the capital, where the family had relatives. Mexico was smaller then than it is now, but it was already one of the most beautiful cities of the world. To the east the shallow waters of the wide lake of Texcoco reflected its domes and palaces. Here and there the city was still pierced by the canals that carried its supplies, giving it the reputation of a second Venice. Through its streets walked Nahoa Indians, as well as deputations of more remote nations, brilliantly dressed in their native costumes. Near the center of the city, in the streets surrounding the great central plaza, lived the Creoles and Europeans — but of these only such as were subjects of the Spanish king. Against this varied background was set a court that in richness of polite ritual was a rival and replica of Madrid itself.

Here, in the court of the viceroy, Juana had a brilliant if

short career. She was about twelve years old when the Marquis of Mancera came to govern Mexico. Not long after, she entered the palace in the retinue of the marchioness. Apparently it was the report of her own talents that gained her this preferment. Before leaving Amecameca, she had written a *loa* in honor of the Blessed Sacrament, and with it she won a book that was offered as a prize by the vicar. She was, besides, quite a linguist. She had learned Latin in twenty lessons. Basque she had probably learned at home from her father. She found in Mexico City, also, an opportunity to learn a fourth language, since the court itself was at this time half Portuguese.

Perhaps the most exciting event during the time of Juana's residence at court was the examination which the viceroy arranged to satisfy himself about the soundness of her learning. On a given day he invited to the palace some forty of the learned men of the city, university teachers and other professional men, with the announced purpose of examining the young woman on various points in their respective fields. Juana was at the time no more than sixteen; yet she met this challenge to the admiration of all present, answering questions and arguments put by experts, each in his own field of study. The marquis himself said later that she parried the questions of the forty sages as a royal warship might have met the pestering of so many little boats. It may be taken as a mark of her character and personality that she seems to have derived little or no self-satisfaction from this triumph.

The Manceras remained in Mexico for ten years, and the relationship between the viceroy's wife and her young attendant ripened into close friendship and lasting affection. During this time Juana's poetic talent became more clearly developed as she grew to womanhood. But almost before she had done so, she decided to leave the palace and enter the Augustinian convent of Saint Jerome, which was located at no great distance from the center of the city. Her vow was taken in the great new cathedral on February 24, 1699. Father Nuñez de Miranda, who was confessor to the marchioness as well as to Juana, saw to all the details, even

arranging the lighting himself. The congregation which attended this service included "the most notable and distinguished of the civil and ecclesiastical Chapters, religious orders, and nobility of Mexico City."

In the convent the new sister grew intellectually and poetically. The retired life she led did not narrow her point of view; instead, it widened it. She no longer devoted herself so single-mindedly to the mastery of an academic type of learning, but found new interests which took their place by the side of the old.

Among the first of these was music. Here was a field in which she could make herself useful to her sisters in religion. So well did she master it that she was able to write a new and more practical method for learning the music of the Church as it was practiced by the nuns.

As the years went by, her poetic talent was often called into play for the production of verses to be sung on feast days, or for entertainment at civic celebrations. On at least fourteen different occasions she wrote a group of *villancicos* for the celebration of some saint's day. These were responsive songs to be sung by a choir and soloist. Those of Sor Juana manifest a great deal of cleverness, sometimes embodying the use of several languages or dialects within a single composition. Yet they are less sharply cerebral than some of the poetry on subjects of her own choosing. A certain brittle intellectual quality that sometimes appears in her work is here softened by a spirit of devotion, and even of playfulness, for there is often a sort of reverent playfulness in the religion of the Hispanic peoples.

Once, at least, in the *Primero Sueño,* she wrote poetry with a philosophic purpose. This is a long and highly conceptistic poem, which some have thought unpoetic. For its poetic effect it depends on a brilliant imagism, while weaving at the same time a continuous tissue of metaphysical argument. It represents the struggle of the soul through the instrumentality of dream to achieve spatial infinity and to transcend the limitations imposed on it by corporeal existence. Sor Juana said in a letter that this was the only thing she

had ever written to please herself, most of her poetry having been composed at the request of others.

Another interest that probably was first developed in the convent was that of painting. A self-portrait which showed her in her religious habit cannot now be found, but there is an early copy of it in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts. It shows a woman with a pretty, but alert and thoughtful face seated at a table. The book in her hand is closed, and in this copy it bears the title, "Works of the Singular American Poetess, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz."

Saint Jerome's was not very far from the viceroy's palace, and Sor Juana was not cut off from her old friends. She corresponded with them and received visits and presents from them. Many a short poem was written to accompany or to acknowledge a gift. It was the verses that counted; the gift might be slight enough, a rose, or even, on one occasion, two chestnuts.

Among those whose acquaintance she cherished was the famous scientist and priest, Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. His vast knowlege of astronomy seems to have awakened a responsive interest in the agile mind of the nun, an interest that is reflected in the imagery of her poetry. Mathematical instruments as well as musical crowded the books in her cell.

Two qualities that particularly endear Sor Juana to moderns are her feminism and her Americanism. Already we find in the Creoles of Mexico a love for America, and a pride in their new land, with its fertility and its riches. This early Americanism is conspicuous also in the writing of Sor Juana's scientific friend, Don Carlos. It is in part a reaction against a European assumption of superiority that was even then becoming familiar to the Mexicans.

> For I was born in bountiful America,
> Compatriot of gold, countrywoman of the metals.
> Here the livelihood of all is almost freely given;
> Nowhere does Earth show herself more a mother.
> It is as though this land's sons were born free of the common curse.
> Since their bread does not cost them travail and sweat.

So wrote Sor Juana in a *romance* addressed to the Portuguese Duchess of Aveyro.

In the seventeenth century, Spain and the Spanish empire did not provide a favorable background for the intellectual growth of women. The progressive and stimulating developments of the epoch of Isabella had somehow become swamped in the complex cultural interactions of the Counter Reformation. Sor Juana found herself beset at times by criticism and advice from those who thought it unbecoming for a nun to come so close as she did to being a public figure. In a letter addressed to His Excellency, the Bishop of Puebla, she made an eloquent plea for the right of women to employ their talents in scholarship as she had done.

The form into which the argument of this letter is cast belongs so specifically to its own time that it would seem strange to us today. It is based on classic instances, and even mythological, for the light of the Renaissance still glowed on that high Western tableland. But in its essence it is still, after so many years, a contemporary document, whose clear central message even in our century, or in our very day, might ring clearly enough in many places.

In the final years of her life Sor Juana seems to have been compelled to bow to this combined onslaught of criticism and advice. Under the influence of her confessor, the same Father Nuñez who so long ago had personally superintended the placing of the candles for the service of her profession, she turned from study to the more personal and intense practice of religion, in such manner that it is said that she did not run toward perfection, but rather flew. Her books and instruments, together with many valuable gifts which had been sent her from all over the world, were sold for the benefit of the poor. In her room she kept only three little devotional works, and, turning her back on the triumphs she had won, she seems to have fixed her hopes entirely on heaven.

We may well believe that she was not reluctant when its call came. A plague breaking out in the city, as it not infrequently did, naturally found its way within the walls of Saint Jerome's. Sor Juana was nursing some of the other

sisters of the convent when the sickness struck her, and we see her for the last time, engaged in this charitable act. She died on April 17, 1695.

In her time Sor Juana's poetry had a tremendous vogue, which is being repeated in the twentieth century. Two volumes of her works were published during her lifetime, and a third was added after her death. All three were much reprinted during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, after which the changing taste of the age caused her to be neglected.

But for the past hundred years a new interest has constantly grown until in the mid-twentieth century it has become a vigorous and widespread enthusiasm. There is in Mexico a constant flow of editions and reprints, and these are invariably exhausted soon after their issue. During the past five years this interest has been quickened more than once by the discovery of new biographical documents which add to our knowledge of the life and understanding of the personality of this truly "singular American poetess."

GOING

When you have wearied of exotic stories
Told by the recent voyager to Greece,
The visitor to Egypt's crumbled glories,
Pilgrim to Rome and the crap games of Nice —
Turn from this tourist to untraveled men
For stories neither glamorous nor pretty,
The travelogs of those who have not been
Far from the umbilicus of one city.

Hear how they necessarily confine
Their trips jogging down the city's belly
Each day to work. With inexpensive wine
And sweat and smoke their homeward bus is smelly.
A few drab blocks — no more — they ride. Yet they
Will take *one* long white journey one white day.

— *John Nixon, Jr.*

THE DAWN

By CARL TONSBERG

Up from the slate-gray ocean climbed the sun,
Bringing with it a common work-a-day.
It touched with crimson all the flat and dun
Prairies of water; firing the rim of spray
Along the beach. The cedar forests lay
Wrapped in blue darkness, rigid in the cold,
And, rock by rock, the cliffs along the bay
Glowed ruby-rose. The dark, fold upon fold,
Drew back — and back — before the onrushing tide of gold.

A ravenous light crept up into the grass
And sent green fires spurting with a hiss
Through each taut blade. Not a thing can bypass
The conquering light; none holds its dark in this
Relentless lava flow which will not miss
One shell, one stone, one weed, one grain of sand.
Every square inch of earth will feel its kiss.
Even in the deepest forest some thin strand
Will snake through the lush ferns and shimmer on bogland.

And now the serpents of the sunrise ooze
Through the morning-glories where they set alight
Small lamps which burn in half a dozen hues
Of varied Heaven colour — from a bright
Azure, through purple down to bluish white.
They touch a rose tree whose flowers of dull red
Burst into flame. Now, suddenly, from the height
Of the poincianas glooming overhead
Three hundred birds proclaim the cold and dark are dead.

Larry Macpherson watched the diamonds glisten
On the cobweb at the corner of the blind,
Lay stretched long and with muted breath to listen

To the bird choir; pondered on what kind
Of pancakes Ma would make, and hoped he'd find
The hole where Maggie's kittens were today;
Thought that the sun looked like an orange rind;
Wondered if John would come across to play,
And if he'd let John look for kittens in the hay.

Light filtered through the tree stumps on the hill
And touched the soft flanks of Madeiros' cows,
Daubing each hair with gold. Crouching quite still,
A black blot on the naked cedar boughs,
An old Tom resting from a night's carouse
Was washed in gold a second. Then he hurled
Out into space. He knows the ways and hows —
And on the wind a few brown feathers twirled,
And there was one less jeering sparrow in the world.

Dew spattering down through the banana leaves
On Monkey Rat has chilled him to the bone.
He grunts and rubs his eyes and slowly heaves
Himself upright and finds he is alone.
He thinks things over and lets out a groan,
Not so much for his head — although the thunders
Rampage within — but that he doesn't own
Even shoes to be sold. He sits and ponders.
'O God! Where's the next bottle coming from!' He wonders.

Maria, Madeiros's wife, was at her chores
Long before daylight. Now, loitering in the sun,
Suddenly her heart cries out for the Azores.
She squints into the light lest the tears run
Down her broad face. She feels the little one
Stir in her womb. Slowly she bends her fat
Belly to earth and lets her fingers run
Along the hard neck of the old tom-cat.
"Where Manual is at home. I must remember that."

Suddenly she starts to sing — an ancient song
Old as the Atlantic isles — to ease the pain

She will not tell her Manual. Out along
The wind floats the old air as sad as rain
On desolate shores: "Never — never again
Will I run on the mountains, lean and wild,
Thin-waisted, bronzed, barefooted. Now my brain
Wrestles with an alien tongue. My heart is riled,
I waddle like a duck, born down by weight of child."

The light seeps in onto the dirty floor
And falls on Mary Brennan's puffy eyes.
She groans awake. "Thank God, the light once more!"
The cancer in her womb sends urgent cries
Up through her body. For the moment wise
Beyond her shallow intellect, she knows
But does not care. "All God's creation dies.
Father McBride says a good person goes
Into a happy land of light and sweet repose."

Isolde wakes and turns over to stare
At the marine beside her. "Very young,"
She thinks, and runs her fingers through his hair.
She glances up and sees his breeches hung
From the chandelier — "Nothing much to be wrung
Out of the pockets." She lies trying to smother
Her screaming sorrow. "I asked to be stung!
There was Old Sarge and Sir Something-or-other
And yet I slept with this — somebody's little brother."

The young face, innocent in fuddled sleep,
Sends a pang through her. She begins to dress.
"Some day some nice girl will get that to keep."
She moves about the room, her restlessness
Mounting with her desolation. "If you press
A flower in your hand too long you'll see it fade
And wilt to an obscene and putrid mess,
A nasty mess which cannot be unmade,
A thing which cannot love or hate or be afraid."

She goes and leans upon the window sill,
Every nerve in her velvet flesh on edge.
She stares at Mary Brennan's daffodil
In its blue bowl on Mary's window ledge.
Methodically she begins to wedge
The window fastenings open with a slow
And mindless force. Beyond the hibiscus hedge
A blackbird calls. She rises on tiptoe
And hurtles forty feet into the court below.

Slowly the great disc of the sun swings free
Of the dun ocean — now no longer dun
But a vast undulating tapestry
Of pointed, sapphire-emerald waves; each one
Capped with a silver spark. The breakers run
Headlong against the cliffs, and rainbows shimmer
In the leaping spray, and the spray pours upon
The lichen and its minute forests glimmer
And the tree-frogs's night song grows by the moment dimmer.

And now the light has conquered! In no place
Can the dark lurk. There is not anywhere
A flower but what the sun has washed its face.
White notes of bird song throb upon the air.
The rose whose breath is like an angel's prayer
Opens — a perfect rose of solid fire,
And, nestled at its feet, the prickly pear
Gives its spines to the wind to make a lyre
While slowly overhead the sun mounts ever higher.

Charlie Brete lowers his third lobster pot
And sits back in the boat. "Uncommon still
So far out with the headland but a blot
Of dull green on the blue." He starts to fill
His pipe, and wonders just how long he will
Be at this business. This morning the pain caught
In his back when he stooped. If only Bill
Were home — he was a damn fool when he bought
The outboard motor. He sits rigid, wrapped in thought.

The fear, buried so deep under the layers
Of consciousness, worms upward through his mind.
What if for all the candles and the prayers
Bill never does come home! He cannot find
Words for his fear. He longs for his wife's blind
And childlike faith that all things will be well.
If it came would she ever be resigned?
Or has she fears like his beneath her shell
Which she will hardly face herself and much less tell.

He looks across the thousand-tinted waters,
The cradle and the grave of all his breed
Of fishermen who married fisher's daughters.
Up in the cemetery you can read
Epitaph after epitaph of the seed
Of Brete; and nearly all have died upon
The bosom of their mistress — none would plead
Not to die on her heart. But all have gone
Willingly. To be drowned was why a Brete was born.

But not to drown in the way Bill must drown
If he should die by water. His mind sees
The black man-made leviathan settling down
On the sea bed. He hears the frantic wheeze
Of lungs which have drunk all the putrid air
And find no more to gulp — they say they give
Them pills which dull the panic and despair —
Once life was not this monstrous negative.
Once it was hard to die instead of hard to live.

Hunger and fear and war and hurricane
Will look upon the sun and flee away.
Rubies and pearls will fall from heaven like rain;
The winds will sing for Lucia's wedding day!
The goldfinch tumbling on the orange spray
Will sing for Lucia. The cricket in the grass
Bring forth a creditable roundelay.
The flowers will carol at the Nuptial Mass,
And not one tear will fall until this day shall pass!

Lucia says well that not one tear will fall
On this, the best day in a thousand years.
Maria leans her great bulk on the wall
And weeps in panic as her hour nears.
The young marine bawls loudly when he hears
The coroner pronounce Isolde dead.
In his skull, pumpkin-thick from many beers,
Insinuating horror rears its head,
"O God! — it might have been — what *was* it that I said!"

Anne Delacroix has turned upon her back
And shut her eyes against the golden rain
Which beats relentlessly down through the black
Béret, blond hair, white skull, into her brain.
Ever since the sun has risen she has lain
Staring into the blue vault of the sky,
Thinking her thoughts. Now she sits up again
And sees a track of burning emerald lie
On the sea. From the west two foam-white herons fly.

She had climbed to the headland cautiously
Under the slowly fading morning stars
And stood there shivering till she could see
A faint glow just above the narrow bars
Of blackness where the reefs lay. "Nothing jars
This fragile glory now I am alone.
Mine is a paradise no creature mars;
Water and wind and light are all my own
And I am made flesh of the earth, bone of her bone."

She pressed her lips against the dew-bright grass
And her ear caught Earth's breathing. Tenderly
She stroked a rock and felt its heartbeats pass
In dim vibrations through her palm. A tree
On the hillside stretched tall, and she could see
Its green soul through the elephantine trunk,
Healthy and young. The dying bayberry
Beside it had an old soul, wan and shrunk.
She watched a tumbling bee, boisterous and nectar-drunk.

Suddenly they thronged upon her — all the powers
Of earth and air. The Legions of the Sun
Threw down their benison in diamond showers.
The blue sea spirits and the Fiery One
Who rides the thunder, the green girls who run
Flickering through the forest shadows, and the pale
Mauve-haired, white-footed ones of beach and dune
Poured down their benedictions like a hail,
And she caught glimpses of bright lances and gold mail.

Her hair was brushed by an invisible wing;
Once more she was alone. "John, I could be
Your wife," she thought, "if I forswore this thing.
A holy state, my love, — but not for me.
No, John, who seeks this glory must stay free
Of every personal love. One who would find
The dwellers of the air and earth and sea
Must love no man and must love all mankind,
And when the emotions stir she must be deaf and blind.

"Not haughtily, not as a misanthrope,
Have I put on austere silver dress
Of spirit, and been well content to drop
The costume jewelry of worldliness.
Marriage, a home, and little hands to press
My bosom, travel, friends — all these are good,
And I would be content with nothing less
Did I ask for more. Teresa would
Not walk my road, and yet Teresa understood."

Her thoughts flew to her friend across the mountain
Shivering in her rough habit as she sat
In meditation by the convent fountain.
"I alone know the reason she did that,
Walled herself up with God. Her lover spat
Upon her, and her lover's family said,
'Afraid of life and crazy as a bat!
It were better for her if she were dead.'
She knew what she must do in the hard years ahead.

"In a world dedicated to the deed,
Machine-enslaved by high priests of 'the thing,'
Only a few can see the howling need
Of spiritual stock-piling. She will bring
Petitions to the Throne unceasingly
While her life lasts. I, on my part, will go
Up and down the world, and where I go will fling
My love upon the winds. We will not know
Where the seed falls or in what furrows we may sow.

"Our only hope is to light similar
Long-burning lanterns where and when we can,
Trusting that even one may be a star
Shining in the jungle for a light to man
Struggling back to the place whence he began;
Seeking the map of Paradise mislaid
Early in his trek. A few must pray and plan
For the vast multitudes a few betrayed.
A few must serve as lamps in the dark forest glade."

Lily O'Toole is getting dressed for church,
Gathering up purse, gloves, missal, rosary;
Moving with the inebriated lurch
Which she has had since she fell down the three
Flights of stairs at the shop. They tell her she
Ought to have sued Old Steen, but things like that
She cannot understand; and really he
Was kind — paid her the whole time she was flat
On her back and once gave her pilchards for her cat.

To go to Mass, to eat, and get to work
She has to get up not later than five.
Thirty-five years she has been a drygoods clerk;
It pays Old Steen to keep Lily alive,
And Steen has done just that. She can contrive
Rent for her third floor room, some meagre fare
For herself and her cat, and from Steen's hive
Of industry, some shopworn duds to wear,
And she lives on the Blessed Sacrament and prayer.

Fish Alley, permeated by the dawn,
Is a thin golden path down which she goes
Each day, and a sweet path to tread upon,
She thinks. She loves the tiny flame-red rose
Sprawling out in the vacant lot. She knows
Every geranium and every sleeper
In the mean street. She lurches on and sows
Her seeds of prayer for known and unknown reaper.
Blessed is the street with such an ever faithful keeper.

Jed Andrews stops, and, leaning on his plough,
Stares at a clump of daisies in the grass,
Then at a patch of mist upon the brow
Of the great peak. Slowly two red clouds pass
Over his field and merge into a mass
Of mother-of-pearl mountains in the west,
And while Jed stares his lean face glows like brass
In the red light. He leans hard with hands pressed
Against the plough, and both his old mules sag at rest.

"I wonder how soon we'll be getting out
The uniforms we have just put away?
Things are so upside down; I have no doubt
We'll drill with those whom we were taught to slay
Last year, and bomb our friends of yesterday.
What will the reason be this time? I think
So men like me can take time off to play
With their own thoughts, meet friends, gossip and drink,
And hear a step outside and neither hush nor shrink.

"It will be for the priceless privilege
Of leaning on the plough to stand and stare;
Of watching mist upon a mountain ridge
And shivering in the sharp mountain air
Long before sunrise, just to catch the rare
Sight of wild geese and hear their haunting cry —
A sight unutterably sad and fair,
Wild geese strung out against an autumn sky.
So we may have these things a million men will die."

Up through the white air spirals the trim lark
With the sun hymn vibrating in her throat
And, far below, the sparrows jeer the dark
Vanquished for another morning, jeer and gloat
Over the moon who, having finally smote
Her way through the blue dome, now disappears.
Charlie Brete, rocking gently in his boat,
Smiles as the lark's song falls upon his ears.
Maria's son is born, and he has dried her tears.

Anne Delacroix walking home through the wood
Halted abruptly. In a patch of sun,
A flickering mist-white shade, Isolde stood.
"Anne Delacroix, do you know what I've done!
I quit before the struggle had begun.
I tried to make things right — you know I tried,
But I was really just a rotten one;
Only a shell with nothing much inside.
Anne Delacroix, I saw my naked soul — and died."

Anne, with the sweat cascading down her spine
And her scalp crawling, answered quietly.
"Peace, Isolde, a greater heart than mine
Must judge you. If you had no help from me
It was my fault. Yet for you there must be
A native land, a happy home somewhere
In some small hamlet of Eternity.
Go seek it, Isolde. Take up your despair
Which is the self-made cross you have ordained to bear.

"Take your bewilderment, panic, and shame
To the All-knowing and All-loving Heart;
My prayers will follow you. Now in the name
Of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost depart!"
As she spoke she could hear some creature start
In the trees above. The little shadow thinned
And flickered. Then she saw a white bird dart
Out of the firs and watched the ghost rescind.
The shadow of a sigh came drifting down the wind.

Father McBride had found the dawn too cold.
As always now, the dampness made him ill
And set the hell-pains throbbing in the old
Wound from Corregidor. Seized by a chill,
He leaned against a vine-clad wall to fill
His bones with the hot sun. It was so good
To rest a bit before he climbed the hill,
Soaking up the glorious heat, and as he stood
Anne Delacroix came walking slowly from the wood.

Usually she stopped to pass the time of day,
But now she only nodded and went on.
She did not even smile. Her face was gray
And she looked frozen though the sun beat upon
And drenched her. All vitality seemed drawn
Out of her, like the blood sucked from the moon
By the devouring sun. When she had gone
Over the hill he thought, "Angel rough-hewn;
Glorious harp of Heaven, lovely and out of tune."

Then, as they always did on seeing Anne,
His thoughts flew to Teresa — darling, small,
Wild little sister, who in the brief span
Of three years had so suddenly grown tall
Physically and spiritually; who at the call
Of The Lover had risen up one day
Leaving home, brother, friend, forsaking all
The woods and fields she loved and going away
Behind the convent wall to watch and love and pray.

He wondered how Anne lived her life alone
In her house on the cliffs above the sea,
Anne who could mark the breathing of a stone
And see the green soul burning in a tree;
Who was the intimate of worm and bee
And gull and fox; Anne who sought out the low,
The mean, the driftwood of humanity
And with her love made it ignite and glow.
"She is earmarked for Heaven," he thought. "It must be so."

Then he looked down and saw between his feet
A small white violet. On its leaf burned
One glowing spark, a dew-drop, a complete
Compact and perfect world, in whose heart churned
Innumerable colours, and he yearned
Over the thing. So lovely and so frail
It would dissolve if he as much as turned
The leaf — "Yet, archangels in golden mail
Will know when this drop falls and when this leaf grows pale.

"And their King knows our hearts. He will not slay
The lovers of the morning. Such as I
Who take Him in our bodies every day,
Never should flinch when the black wind goes by;
Never should tremble lest His light should die,
Nor ever think the darkness and the cold
Can win and reign forever — they'll soon lie
Under the last year's leaves. No night can hold
Against the on-rolling Sun and His swift tides of gold!"

He shook himself, then he crawled up the hill,
Feeling the good warmth run through every vein,
And as he walked blessed this run-of-the-mill
Day, which like every day would bring its pain
Of birth and death and see its millions slain
And countless villainies before the night.
Anne Delacroix heard a voice in her brain,
"Anne! There's a country out here in the light!
Don't worry about me — I'm going to be all right."

Now the sun moved directly overhead.
The cloudless sky was a thick azure dome.
A toad took shelter in a pansy bed.
A white cat picked her way across black loam.
Anne Delacroix stood watching the bright foam
Hiss up along the beach and come to rest,
And thought, "Isolde has at last gone home."
She heard a black bird twittering in her nest,
Telling tales to the fledglings under her dark breast.

NEW BOOKS

The Submerged Village and Other Poems. By James Kirkup. Oxford. $2.00.

This second volume of James Kirkup's poems confirms the great promise of his first. It is modern poetry in its best sense; having demolished the old stereotypes, to establish new disciples better suited to the intelligent mind seeking equilibrium in the chaos of present world conditions. Its forms owe much to music; not merely tunefulness, which poetry has always had, but actual knowledge of harmony and musical form, developing a theme, varying, repeating it in changing tempos and moods, ringing in refrains with subtle rhymes, and even with ideas — the word "fall" in "The Last Man" comes in like the strokes of a bell tolling — a similar effect is made with adjectives ringing the change on hopelessness in the "Letter to a Poet" (Auden) — and so contriving a verbal symphony.

As for the themes, a very slight one may serve to start with — the apparent motion of a train standing in the railway station — the multiplied reflections of mirrors face to face — more often a flash of beauty in a painting or a dancer stirs the poet's recollections of meaning that shape the material into a final Wordsworthian intimation. Only he is no Wordsworth, escaping from unpleasant revolution to the placid English countryside, but a modern Englishman, with bombs falling all around. So poems like "The Last Man" take on an awful apocalyptic glare like those of Thomas Merton. And he too comes to a spiritual resting place, in love and "The Brotherhood of Human Need."

Cape Horn and Other Poems. By Ernest Kroll. Dutton. $2.75.

There is always an exciting feeling of discovery in reading a first book of poems by a young author who has something to say and command of the means with which to say it. Mr. Kroll has profited by modern experiments; he can sketch a scene with the sharp outlines of the Imagists, or speak with the clipped, every-day accents of T. S. Eliot. He is alive to everything going on around him, as he travels

from Cape Horn to Cape Cod, around the world, and away into outer space on the wings of Doctor Einstein's vision. He catches unerringly the significant point in each experience; we feel the hopeless misery of the miners —

Hacking for their damp
Bituminous souls'
And bodies' cramp
Inches of ease . . .

mostly within stark
Blackness, tunneling right
Through the solid dark
Into a darker night . . .

— we see from under the brim of Whittier's hat, where —

dangles from a rigid branch
Above the warm red clay
The shape of the emancipated man, . . .

That shadow on the sky,
The same as in the nineteenth century
Narrowed Whittier's eye.

Reading "Expanding Universe," we remember a very different poem at a different turning point in the human journey — George Edward Woodberry's "Beyond Good and Evil" and, hearing again the slam of a door on the old complacencies, step out into the dark.

This Insubstantial Pageant. By Monk Gibbon. Devin-Adair. $2.00.

Never came sweeter honey out of rock than when Irish poets learned to write English verse. Monk Gibbon has that delicate, sensitive awareness, that deceptively simple magic, that seems the special property of Irish poets. While there is obvious kinship with his fellows, notably Yeats — Gibbon's poem, "Yeats' Earlier Poems," is one of the most touching and implacably just criticisms of the Master — he has a quality all his own. Perhaps what distinguishes him most is the skill with which he fuses innocent, childlike wonder at beauty and penetrating logical search for truth. For example, a little poem of six lines compares Truth with the moon. In long, melodious vowels he calls up the image of the moon, as she

"Moves in her path, calm, lone, remote, serene,"
— then cracks,
— "Do not forget one thing.
Only one-half — at most — is ever seen."

But it is impossible to give here an idea of the richness and variety contained in this little book — ranging from lightest cobweb fancy to deep metaphysical probing. Perhaps the lovely lyrics, with their almost Blakean clearness and directness, will have more appeal. But the prose poems have also a rhythm, not imposed, welling up from within. "Of Other Poets" proves that a love poem need not be metrical to touch the heart. Remarking the vain boasts of poets to immortalize their loves by their words, "that Time very zealous searching all things out to destroy . . . makes silent," he says:

But I have spoken of my love for you hardly at all, and I have made my songs out of a few words, that Time perhaps in passing might not notice them.

Lovers of Eire will be glad that all her poets did not die in the Rising. They will find poignant memories in the tribute to Francis Sheehy Skeffington, "The Political Prisoner":

Others hated, he had none.
Others slew, but he unarmed
Had walked the streets that day to keep
The cause he loved from folly harmed.

Within an hour they took that man
And shot him dead against a wall.
Something died within the heart
That heard their shots and knew him fall.

Something died within the heart,
Beside faint hope that met them when
They bore him out. I seemed to lose
Faith in all my fellow men.

But there is a happier note on Eire today. The poet, far from home, asks of a star how fares his native land. And the reply:

All is well with her people also.
Other nations, cities and wealth destroy.
None that I pass from dusk till the dusk that follows
Keeps her barefooted joy.

THE LENGTHENING SHADOW: *Twenty-four Word Pictures of the Life of Christ.* By Velma Sprigg Geiger. Christopher. $1.75.

The charming simplicity of this little poem-cycle on the life of Jesus reminds one of Rilke's *Marienleben.* It combines the homely pictures of every-day life with tender reverence. More, though, than a touching memorial, the poems voice the deep need for Christ in the world today — when we have "bartered prayer for atom bombs" — closing with this benediction:

Be still, this is the hour of peace.
Each vibrant minute Time has clocked
Begs of the anxious heart to cease
Its fretting, let all cares be flocked
Like sheep upon a distant hill.
The Star is silvering the sky
And hushed men wonder at the still
Calm spreading, yet they ask not why,
But let the balm descend to stay
The hurt of earthly things.

The stall
Is ready with its June-sweet hay.
The world awaits the borning call.

THE PLUMES OF DREAM. By Margaret Ridgely Partridge, with an Introduction by Walter de la Mare. Coward-McCann. $2.50.

Mrs. Partridge's poems have won praise from poets and churchmen, here and abroad; her verse-portraits of Theodore Roosevelt, Albert of Belgium, King George the Fifth, and other great men, reflect the distinguished qualities of their subjects; and one of her poems, "The Pilgrim Pavement?" has been set to music by Vaughan Williams and sung in Anglican cathedrals.

She possesses a remarkably sensitive ear and sets to exquisite music her intuitions and dreams that range into rarified mental states beyond thought.

Christ Unconquered. By Arthur Little, S.J. Illustrated by Fritz Kredel. Introduction by Fulton Oursler. Prentice-Hall. $4.50.

The great drama of the Crucifixion is the theme of this epic poem, developed and expanded in the light of the author's interpretation, and expressed in blank verse which, Mr. Oursler points out, suggests the grandeur of Milton.

The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough. Edited by H. F. Lowry, A. L. P. Norrington, and F. L. Mulhauser. Oxford. $7.00.

Arthur Hugh Clough's is one of those deep voices among the poets that, literally, sway empires. No one could have heard Winston Churchill quoting his "Say not the struggle nought availeth," in the famous "Backs-to-the-Wall" speech, without feeling this as England speaking, England at its best. Many of his other poems have had a quiet but irresistible effect upon British social and religious thought.

So it may seem strange that ninety years have passed since Clough's death before a complete collection of his works has been published. This edition, suitably garbed in the dignified format of the Clarendon Press, contains all of the poems previously printed, without the former omissions, and many hitherto unpublished. Variant readings have been included in an appendix. The editing, to which Clough's family and friends have contributed much loving labor, has been admirably done, and no student of Nineteenth Century literature can afford to be without this finally adequate presentation of Clough's work.

The Alcestis of Euripides. Translated into English Prose with Introduction and Notes by D. W. Lucas. Russell F. Moore Company. $1.50.

When a play fifteen hundred years old is a hit on Broadway, even the stubbornest philistine has to admit that it must possess some extraordinary vitality, something timelessly human. This Professor Lucas has proved, in a translation that is clear and natural to modern thought, yet faithful to the intention of the original. The Introduction and Notes add much to the reader's comprehension and enjoyment.

THE ELECTRA OF EURIPIDES. Translated into English Prose with Introduction and Notes by D. W. Lucas. Russell F. Moore Company. $1.50.

Perhaps even more than the *Alcestis,* the *Electra* shows Euripedes' dramatic force and psychological insight. We wonder whether the ancient Greeks were so very different in their thinking from modern men, or whether the art of the theater has really learned much since his day.

GALLERY TOUR. By Sara Kolb Danner. Stanford University. $5.00.

A beautiful book by an artist who has the twin arts of poetry and painting at her command, to picture California landscapes, birds, flowers, paintings, and her own children.

RIP VAN WINKLE: A LEGEND OF THE KAATSKILL MOUNTAINS. By Washington Irving. Elfriede Abbe, *del.* & *sculp.* Printed by the Engraver at Ithaca, New York. $10.00.

A truly sumptuous edition of the rollicking classic, with woodcuts that catch all the delightful flavor of the text. The artist, who designed the book and did all the work of printing herself, is a sculptor of note, represented in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and elsewhere.

W. B. YEATS: SELF-CRITIC, *A Study of his Early Verse.* By Thomas Parkinson. University of California Press. $2.75.

A reviewer in an earlier issue of *Poet Lore* called attention to Yeats' remarkable employment of self-criticism, little guessing that a work expounding this very subject was then in preparation. It is a work that should prove most useful to students of Yeats, following step by step the poet's development, from his first major volume, *Crossways,* published in 1889, to his final revisions, which in Professor Parkinson's view coincide with the appearance of *The Winding Stair,* in 1933, and so, though Yeats kept on revising right up to the end, with the definite boundary between his earlier and his later verse.

Yeats' methods, his laborings, questionings, reconsiderings, and restatements in what he felt was more adequate form of themes which remained basically the same, are paralleled by the process disclosed in Beethoven's notebooks;

both achieved their effects in spite of lack of natural facility — it is surprising to learn that Yeats had to scan on his fingers — and both suggest Mr. Ted Shawn's theory, that great art is not the result so much of great talent as of great perseverance.

Acres of Flint: Writers of Rural New England, 1870-1900. By Percy D. Westbrook. Scarecrow Press. $4.00.

It is a joy to find a book on New England writers by one who really understands the New England mind — and conscience! Quoting Whittier's verdict, that "he who would successfully strive for it must be himself what he sings — a part and parcel of that rural life of New England," Mr. Westbrook rejects the appraisal of such outsiders as Eugene O'Neill, and says, "The final value . . . the human value . . . always the most difficult to estimate, . . . can be judged only from actual contact with the people themselves." Such contact, not only with the people, but with the spiritual heritage compounded of Calvinistic moral fervor and pioneering love of liberty, makes this a remarkably perceptive study of New England writers and their cultural background.

Among the authors considered, the analyses of Rowland E. Robinson, Sarah Orne Jewett, Rose Terry Cooke, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Celia Thaxter, and Lucy Larcom are especially interesting. Other better known figures are treated but briefly, because already well recorded, and some more famous members of Bostonian literary circles are omitted because they are less representative of typically New England ways than the chroniclers of rural scenes. But Edwin Arlington Robinson is mentioned as one who, although he left his homeland early, preserved the peculiarly intense preoccupation with spiritual and psychological problems that is characteristic of the New Englander.

Early American Poets. Selected, with an Introduction by Louis Untermeyer. Library Publishers. $5.00.

One would think the early American settlers would have had enough to do — what with a wild new country to ex-

plore, corn to be planted, scalps to be preserved, not to speak of these strange new ideas of freedom to be tried out — without writing poetry about it. But, as Mr. Untermeyer proves in this excellent sampling, some of them did; and their work, while not remarkable for originality of form, shows vivacity and wit with many a vivid picture of the hardships and rewarding joys of life in a growing young nation. As with all Mr. Untermeyer's anthologies, the selection is made with a finely discriminating sense of what is truly poetic.

The Background of Modern Poetry. By J. Isaacs. Dutton. $2.50.

It would be hard to find a book which gives in so small a compass such a clear analysis of the elements making up what we call "modern poetry." As a matter of fact, Professor Isaacs shows "modern poetry" has been reappearing all through history, and with it the anguished cries of protest, from Plato, who wrote, "Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole state, and ought to be prohibited;" down through the forgotten critics of Spenser, "The New Poet;" the formidable *Edinburgh Review,* blasting Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats, as "illegible and unintelligible," "contemptible," "villainous," "wearisome," "unmetrical, incoherent banalities." And still in every age its successors, the *Saturday Review* and the *Quarterly Review,* sniffing at Swinburne in the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth at Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and their "unmetrical, incoherent banalities." And still in every age the phoenix, Poetry, keeps rising from the ashes of the past.

Our "new poetry" in its background appears to have started with the Renaissance and its influx of novel ideas in science, theology, and poetry. Through ensuing waves — the Metaphysical Poets, the Romantics, the French Symbolists, the Imagists, and our "modern poet," the omniscient Mr. Eliot — poets have sought through trial and error, imitation, and inspiration, to conjure up the austere vision of the heart and make it luminous to other hearts.

WHAT HAPPENS IN HAMLET. By J. Dover Wilson, C. H. Cambridge University Press. $5.00.

With all the zest and minute painstaking of a Sherlock Holmes unraveling a baffling mystery, Professor Wilson has tracked down the real Hamlet, and so far as is humanly possible, answered the questions which Shakespeare evidently never expected would be fully answered. They involve a question which humanity has never been able to answer: why people convinced of the absolute rightness of their motives manage to deceive themselves and others, and thus set in motion the most dreadful tragedies of life. Against which tendency Hamlet stands a peculiarly heroic figure in his determination not to be deceived.

Professor Wilson has made a careful study of all the earliest and most authentic versions of *Hamlet,* together with much of the other literature of the period with which he has reason to believe Shakespeare was familiar. He has found many instances where an incorrect understanding of the contemporary meaning of a word or an actual misprint has raised hob with the text. For example, the familiar line, "O that this too too solid flesh would melt," should read, "this too too *sullied* flesh," — indicating clearly his sense of degradation at his mother's sin. He reasonably suggests that reconstruction of Shakespeare's lost stage directions might clear up some puzzling incidents, such as Hamlet's insulting language to Ophelia, which might be elucidated by supposing that he had overheard the conversation between the King and Polonius and their plot to use her as bait.

Contemporary works on spiritualism and psychology throw a flood of light on Shakespeare's intentions, both as regards to the ghost and to Hamlet's madness. These and many other obscure matters, the play-scene with the enigmatic dumb-show, Ophelia's funeral, and the fencing-match as it was clearly understood by Elizabethan sporting fans, are shown up with startling effect. There can be no doubt that Professor Wilson has come very close to restoring the drama to its original overwhelming force; and future players of the role of *Hamlet* cannot afford to overlook his interpretation.

BOOKS RECEIVED

American Beauty or Courtship at West Point. By Harry de Metropolis. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $1.00.

A Bluer Sky. By Mary Glover Nettleton. Boston: Humphries. $2.50.

Contemporary French Poetry. By Joseph Chiari. New York: Philosophical Library. $3.75.

The Cry of the Wanderer. By Robert L. Peters. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $1.00.

Daughter of Eve. By Donnafred Baker Hoff. Chicago: The Dierkes Press. $2.00.

The Death of the Hero and Other Poems. By William R. Brashear. Boston: Humphries. $2.50.

A Dream of Poets. By G. M. Drummond. Eagle Butte, South Dakota: Privately printed. $2.00.

The Fanfarlo and Other Verse. By Muriel Spark. Aldington: Ashford: Kent, England: The Hand and Flower Press. 3 shillings 6 pence net.

Fire-Bird. By Dallas Kenmare. New York: Philosophical Library. $2.75.

First Poems. By Ogden Plumb. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $1.00.

Flickerings. By Madge Acton Mansfield. Boston: Humphries. $2.50.

The Golden Hill. By Eunice McCloskey. Boston: Humphries. $3.00.

The Grace Notes. By Annabelle Merrifield. Boston: Humphries. $2.50.

Grey Pools and Reflections. By Berniece Bunn Christian. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $2.50.

132 *Heart-Reaching Poems.* By Theodore W. Engstrom. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House. $1.50.

In Beauty's Presence. By Isla Paschal Richardson. Boston: Humphries. $2.75.

Just Everyday Poems. By Ruth Hathaway Miller. New York: William-Frederick Press. $2.00.

Lights and Shadows. By William Morton Overton. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $2.50.

Metrical Musings. By Dale Allen. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $2.00.

Never Tell the Vision. By Catherine Le Master Eckrich. Boston: Humphries. $2.75.

One Beneath the Sun. By H. Edward Richardson. New York: Exposition Press. $2.50.

Pleasant Pathos. By Walter J. Cunningham. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $1.00.

Rhyme and Rhythm. By Sophie Willits Kayer. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $ .50.

The Simple Things and Other Poems. By O. G. Richter. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $2.00.

The Song I Sing. By Howard E. Evans. Boston: Humphries. $2.00.

Song of Death. By Robert L. Peters. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $1.00.

Songs of Shadow and Shining. By Paul J. Linsley. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $2.00.

Storm at Westminster. By E. M. Almedingen. New York: Oxford University Press. $1.75.

The Symbolism of Flowers and Other Poems. By Edward A. Clark. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $2.00.

This Alien Earth. By Katherine Gorman. Boston: Humphries. $2.50.

This Too Is America. By John Rossel. New York: William-Frederick Press. $3.00.

Thoughts from the Thicket. By Helen Nixon Forsythe. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $2.00.

Tu Fu. By William Hung. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University Press. $5.00.

Verses for all Occasions. By Ervin H. Strub. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $1.50.

Vision of Time. By Hal Summers. Aldington: Kent, England: The Hand and Flower Press. 1 shilling net.

The Volatile Painter and Other Poems. By Harold F. Richman. New York: The William-Frederick Press. $1.00.

Whispering Echoes. By Carmen C. Compney, Jr. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company. $1.50.

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